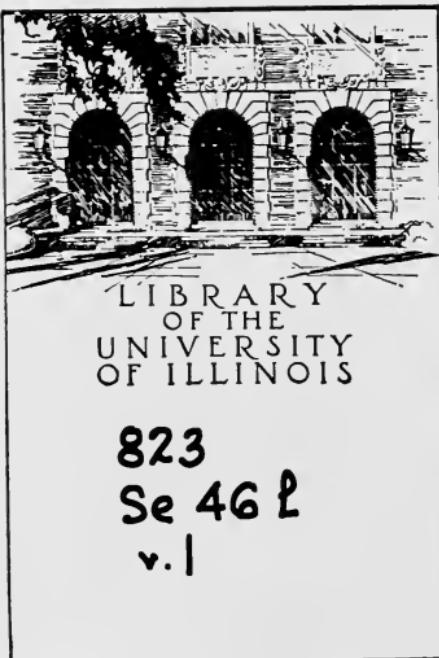


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LITTLEDALE.

LITTLEDALE.

BY SEJANUS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON :

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1878.

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LITTLEDALE.

CHAPTER I.

LITTLEDALE is a small town. No bustling railway has ever invaded its quiet precincts; no coach pulls up or ever pulled up at the principal inn. If you wanted to leave in a genteel manner, you could post; if in an economical manner, various carriers of various degrees of style ran in all directions, or you could take a fly to the nearest railway station, about six miles' distance.

The legendary history of Littledale ran back so far and got so confused that no two inhabitants told it alike. It had never produced any great man except once, and he had proposed to pull

down the centre row of houses and make the town one wide street. The improvement was carried out. He died shortly afterwards, and, being deposited in the churchyard with a handsome monument, was much respected. “Whom the gods love die young.” John Smith did not live long enough to blight his fame by either going away (an unpardonable offence in the provincial mind) or any other thing out of the common, in which particular he was fortunate. “The hero of Saratoga may become Benedict Arnold the traitor.”

The wide street remained; but the houses pulled down were built in other places. At the top of the town various edifices sprang up, inhabited by the *élite*, and at the bottom two little streets appeared in opposite directions, giving the idea of a T upside down.

John Smith had a son who, being without the wide and comprehensive genius of his father, turned his attention to selling groceries, and made money. His customers were numerous, but their respective purchases were small; nevertheless Tobias thrived. In those days there were no inspectors of weights and measures. Tobias had a

son, whom he named Joshua, and made a gentleman or lawyer of him. Joshua, on the death of his father, sold the grocery business, pulled out the shop, put a private front to his house, painted the front door a bright and lively green, and mounted an immaculate brass plate—"J. Smith, Solicitor." Business came in; the other lawyer died, and J. Smith had all the legal business to be got in the place. In due time Joshua married, and christened his first-born Harold, whom he fondly hoped would carry the fame of the family beyond Littledale. But, unfortunately for human contrivance, Harold disliked the law, disliked work, and most of all disliked the office.

Harold kept dogs; and one of them on a day in August was rolling in the street before the green door, and even raised such a dust as to hide for a moment the glories of the brass plate. Still Turk kept on rolling, until another dog, eager to join in the game, approached and began to roll too. If "familiarity breeds contempt," contempt in turn breeds shortness of temper. Turk was aroused; he felt an intruder near; served process—"injunction of teeth." Strange dog gave notice

of appeal with a deep growl. Turk held to the original motion. Strange dog was about to do so, when a stick decided. Both dogs looked up and saw a pair of eyes that told them of selfish indifference to the pain of others. Dogs are good physiognomists: Turk and his antagonist separated. The owner of the stick was a man about forty-five, dressed with a certain assumption of rank, but the ruffled condition of the clothes, dirty neck-cloth, and dissipated appearance gave anything but a favourable impression. The heavy eyes were bloodshot and dull under the hanging eyebrows; the coarse, sensual mouth and pimpled nose completed a face that bore the unmistakable stamp of sensuality and vice. With a certain air of determination he rang the bell labelled "Office." The door was opened by a youth, apparently about nineteen, whose face presented a perfect contrast to that of his master's client. The latter inquired, in a voice both thick and indistinct—

"Governor in, hey, Jones?"

"Yes, Mr. Maunder, he is. Shall I tell him you want him?"

"What else do you think I come for? Tell him to look sharp, I can't wait."

An expression of contempt passed over the face of the clerk, but instantly vanished as, handing the visitor a seat, he went into the inner office, from which he soon returned and ushered in his master's client with apparently profound respect.

The door of the inner office shut, and Maurice Jones was left alone. He heard a second door fasten, which he knew meant "business." In an instant he was off his stool, had fastened the door leading to the passage, removed one of the files of papers hanging against the wall, taken a paper tube out of his desk and applied it to the wall in a part where a hole bored nearly through rendered every word audible to the unsuspected listener. As he stood and listened, the descending sun poured a flood of light through the half skylight, half window, at the side of the room. A halo of golden glory fell on the stool and desk, littered with the usual residuum of a lawyer's office, and as it fell on the crouching figure against the wall, it brought out more distinctly the expression of fixed resolve so unusual in a face so young, a

very ominous want of height in the forehead, but a head of splendid development in other parts ; and as he patiently waited, losing not a single word, the quivering nostrils were the only part that gave token of life in the silent figure against the wall of the office.

His clothes anything but new ; boots that were certainly weather-tight, but patched and mended ; his limp and browned hat, hanging on a peg, would have raised a curious question in the mind of any spectator as to how long it would be ere the determined will and intellect would carry the possessor beyond the position he was apparently doomed to for life.

The lawyer's inner chamber was garnished with tin boxes, bearing the names of various clients ; a writing-table in the centre of the room ; a lamp on the mantelpiece ; two or three almanacks of various fire and life offices. Three very uncomfortable wooden chairs for clients and a very comfortable padded one for his own use, and the inventory of the contents of the room was complete, with the exception of the owner, who, having asked Mr. Mauder to take a seat, waited for him to commence the conversation.

The lawyer was about the same age as his visitor, but looked good for at least twenty years longer life. At forty-five the hand of time had but lightly touched his frame, except to toughen it. His hair was scant on the top of the head, but the full bushy whiskers and close-shaven black chin were untouched by even a suspicion of silver threads ; a pair of restless grey eyes, straight straggling eyebrows, a well-proportioned nose, and rather small mouth gave the appearance of craft rather than talent.

" Well, squire," inquired Joshua, " what brings you here ? "

" Money ! " said his visitor, curtly.

" Well, you can't have much more. The seven outlying farms are all sold, and you have had the cash ; the Grange is mortgaged beyond its value, and were it not that some of the orchards are still unmortgaged, my client would not hold off from foreclosing. Shall I get you down the deeds ? "

" No ; what I want is money. As for your client, I know where he is," and Mauder significantly pointed over his shoulder towards a large chest containing the securities that were the private property of the lawyer.

Joshua Smith tried to look hurt, but finding it did no good, assumed a friendly, not to say jocular, strain.

"I don't deny that I may have advanced the money myself, but it was for the sake of friendship. I have advanced more than any one else would, and have been more lenient in the matter of interest not paid up; but I have to tell you clearly and decidedly, once for all—you have run your tether. There is nothing more, that I know of, which you can sell, mortgage, or pawn."

"I didn't come to hear all this," said his visitor, impatiently. "Money I must have, and I don't intend to go without it; if I do I shall seek another lawyer."

Joshua didn't like the sound of this at all; for, not to mention one or two errors of detail, the farms had all been sold considerably under their worth, and reprobate as he knew Maunder to be, there was just one good point left. He entered with great care and exactness all money received, the production of which account would much bother Joshua if in the hands of a clever antagonist. After a long and stormy altercation, composed of a

great many curses on one side and lies on the other, James Maunder, Esq., as he loved to be addressed, executed a deed of entire surrender, for five hundred pounds down, of all his landed and house property (everything else had gone before) in favour of Joshua Smith. The clerk was despatched to get a couple of witnesses, and quickly returned with two neighbours, who, living in houses belonging to Joshua, were allowed a consideration off the rent every year, as they were obligingly deaf and blind to all except their own signatures. The deed was on the table and all ready.

“ You will please to sign here ‘James Maunder’ in full,” said Joshua. His client looked up, and with a faint show of bravado threw down the pen with a most magnificent air.

“ I have altered my mind,” he said.

Just then Joshua shifted the deed; the far corner touched a bag that in turn gave forth a pleasant sound of chinking sovereigns. What the eye of the snake is to the fascinated bird, so was the sound to the ears of Maunder. Snatching up the pen, he signed his name, clutched at the bag given him, and strode out.

The witnesses departed. Smith and his clerk were left alone.

" You will go to-morrow to the Grange, and tell Mrs. Parkhouse she had better look out for another residence, and take her personal effects. Mind, I am not going to let her any of my houses, either as agent or principal."

" Yes, sir."

" And as for the child——" He stopped.

We are all human in some way, and though a man may persuade himself he is above the weakness, the mind plays curious tricks with even the most hard-hearted. A vision floated before the eyes of Joshua of a fair, beautiful woman and three children, surrounded by every luxury wealth could purchase, who had years before offered him refreshment when calling at the house on business, and made him feel in a brighter, purer atmosphere than he had usually known in his tangled career. Eunice Maunder now slept beneath the churchyard turf, but the bright spot on memory's waste made by a good and tender woman still floated like a ray of sunshine on a dark and stagnant pool.

"On second thoughts, I will call myself to-morrow. You can go for the night, Jones."

The town clock struck half-past five as Maurice Jones emerged from his employer's house.

Maunder had gone straight to the Feathers, the most ostentatious public-house that Littledale supported. The sign was the three Prince of Wales's feathers, and the familiar *Ich Dien*, "I serve," beneath—a most appropriate motto certainly for a house of entertainment.

For the present it was lighter out of doors than in, but the sun had all but dipped behind the distant hills; the western sky still glowed with golden clouds that were changing to a living opal as the hours passed on. The lights began to appear at one window after another. The windows of the Feathers were conspicuous by their superior brilliance; the sounds of revelry came on the breeze at intervals. Jones turned quickly down the street till he came to a small house, above the door of which was a sign hardly to be read in the failing light—"Matthew Elgood, Ladies' and Gentlemen's Boot and Shoe Maker. Repairs neatly executed."



CHAPTER II.

THE golden rays of the setting sun touched with a burning glory the roofs and houses that looked mere ordinary brickwork in broad daylight, but in the golden glamour of declining day looked fairy palaces, fit for the abode of those wonderful characters described in tales that somehow so seldom appear in real life.

On the side of a gentle declivity the sun's rays fell with more than usual beauty, gilding the patched and dirty verandah that ran along the front of a red-brick house. In front, and running beyond the house on one side, was a rather extended lawn. A carriage-drive led up to the front door of the mansion, cutting the lawn off from a belt of ornamental trees, which in turn

prevented the stables, cow-houses, piggeries, etc., being seen from the front entrance. Beyond, green fields spread their living emerald, among which tall trees and variegated hedgerows mingled with fields of corn ready for the sickle or studded with rows of sheaves ready to be carted home. All nature looked glad, happy, and joyful.

Two boys and a girl leaned on the railing and looked across the valley, or sometimes cast a glance to the end of the verandah, whence a view of several orchards diversified the corn fields or meadows. The two boys were apparently the same age; in reality, they were fourteen and fifteen, but the younger one's more robust frame made them look like twins. James, the elder, was looking over the hedges that bordered the high-road, with wistful anxiety. Robert, the second, was leaning on his elbows with a discontented expression, rubbing one foot over another to the detriment of his shoes, had they not been so worn that it was almost impossible to deteriorate those articles of attire, gone past everything except dislocation or dissolution. The third in the group, the girl, who was holding with her hands one of

the verandah posts above her head, and leaning against the upraised arm, said—

“When will father be home, Robert? Do you know?”

“Can’t tell, Clara,” said Robert, whose face and tone alike conveyed the idea of small desire for the parental return.

“I know where he went,” said James. “He went to Lawyer Smith’s;” and as he spoke a dark thundercloud passed over his face.

“What! Whenever he goes there he does not come back till late,” said his brother.

Robert balanced himself on his legs very wide apart, like a drunken person trying to keep his balance. Clara laughed out loud at the imitation, which certainly the children had had plenty of opportunities of seeing in the original.

“Be quiet, Robert,” said James. “That is not the worst.”

“Well, then,” asked Robert, “what is the worst?”

James looked to the end of the verandah, where Clara was watching the flight of a moth as it circled above her head. He motioned his brother

nearer, pointing to Clara with all the superiority assumed over girls by boys generally. Robert brought his head near to his brother, and the boyish look went out of his face, which seemed to harden into a set stony stare that it was hard one so young should have to gaze on—the Medusa head of sorrowful despair, as James said—

“ Waxy was here last night, I suppose for his money, but he didn’t get it ; but he and Parky sat ever so long talking——”

“ Think he’s going to marry Parky ? ” interrupted Robert.

“ No. But he told Parky that it couldn’t go on much longer ; that Stubbs’s farm was sold, and he was afraid the Grange would go next ; and then Parky began to cry, and I couldn’t help crying too. Think of all the farms being gone at the Feathers ! ”

“ How was it they let you hear ? ”

“ Oh, I was writing a copy, but I stopped to hearken, and then the copy-book was so wet I couldn’t finish it, and so I slipped away.”

Both boys instinctively looked over the landscape, with wistful yearning in their eyes beyond their years. Think not that children cannot feel

because the most of their emotions are apparently evanescent. Their feelings are interrupted, not changed. Geologists tell us that the wonderful diversity of hill and dale, the glory of the various charms of earth, had their origin in the upheaval of the various strata when the earth was young; that once Cornwall joined Brittany, with endless groves and forests of matchless beauty making the earth glad that lay between them, till the salt wave covered them apparently for ever. Nevertheless between the rocky coasts still lie the buried forms of beauty, perchance to rise again in the future history of the planet, covered with the weeds and spume of ocean, or as a coal-bed to light up with dusky gleam some Black Country of the future. So the glad feelings of the brothers were on that sad evening buried beneath the salt wave of sorrow, only to reappear in after life covered with the ocean slime of avarice, or to light the fires of ambition.

Still the declining sun smiled on the green meadows that were thickly studded with the brows-ing kine that ruminated by the banks of the silver streams, lined on each side by a brighter streak of

emerald green. Higher up, the hills were girt with a golden belt of waving corn fields; the tops were bright with the fleecy coats of patient sheep browsing on grass, alternated with patches of purple heather, that, like a crown of pearls and garnets, stood thick on the hill-tops bright in the rays of sunlight.

As James looked on the land that had passed away from his father's house, he felt a touch on his shoulder. Slightly turning, he saw his brother's face close to his. The hands of the two clasped with instinctive sympathy; not a word was spoken by either, but they understood one another in the quiet evening. Their faces fixed on the land once theirs, but alienated by drunkenness and debauchery; heart spake to heart. No great sentiment can be perfectly given by the tongue to the ear. Words are but counters, the coins of intellectual exchange, which resemble no more the thing meant than the coin resembles what it purchases. The same word drops from the lips of the deceitful and the true, it may be the one to be believed, and the other to be doubted; but when heart speaks to heart in silence, often a more

durable bond of union is knit than the loudest protestations and most eloquent appeals can ever effect. Often a bond is forged in solemn silence that death in vain may try to sever or weaken. Often the proudest efforts of studied eloquence are but as "tinkling brass" compared with the golden link that silence may rivet in the soul. Clara turned on her heel and went into the house. The shadows of the evening were creeping on ; still the boys remained in the verandah, motionless, and still none the less wide awake. The clock in the church tower struck again and again ; hour after hour crept on as the silver moon sailed across the clear blue sky, when James said—

" Robert, let's go in ; I hear Parky on the look-out for us."

" Right you are, Jimmy."

" But, I say, don't tell her what I told you."

" Not if I knows it."

" Master James ! Master Robert !" said a rather thin voice, " where are you ? "

" Coming, nurse, coming," said both at once ; and, apparently forgetting their late deep feeling, they scampered in to supper.

It was not a plentiful meal by any means ; and the one poor candle, that hardly gave a better light than the moon, seemed to make darkness visible.

Parky, whose real name was Parkhouse, sat unusually quiet at the top of the table, dealing out pieces of bread and cheese with strict impartiality to the three claimants that sat round. The kitchen was a comfortable square apartment, with hooks on the ceiling, at one time loaded with hams, tongues, and bacon, now empty. The dirty marks on the walls told of neglect ; the broken plaster told of decay ; the mutilated set of dinner ware, the odd numbers of different sorts of glasses on the dresser, all told the same story of decay and poverty. Jugs guiltless of handle or spout, except in one or two instances, gave the same idea. Nevertheless the fireplace was clean, and a little fire cheerfully sparkled in its depths ; but the sparing way the fuel was evidently doled out, gave even that a dismal appearance. On the mantel-shelf shone brightly four brass candlesticks and various brazen ornaments, which seemed to be the one whole spar left in the wreck.

Mrs. Parkhouse, in her clean cap, sat upright ;

so neat and so starched, she looked like the genius of order come to arrange the scattered fragments in proper position.

James sat next her, with his sister between him and Robert. As the immediate cravings of hunger were appeased, a small cup of cider was handed to each, which they drank, and having signified that for the present their bread and cheese would not suffer further diminution, the children rose from their chairs and sat in the settle at the side of the fire. Clara, who was thirteen, gradually leaned her head against the end of their seat and fell asleep. James looked in the few bright places in the bit of fire, and saw all sorts of bright fortune for himself, Robert, and Clara—all the land bought back, carriages such as he remembered but more splendid, fine horses, palaces; and finally everything was lost in a vague sense of comfort and rest. The last thing he could recollect was a view of himself, a little taller, arrayed as a fine gentleman, taking Clara to court covered with silks and jewels.

Robert also looked in the fire, and thought of the hole he was going to bait with grains in the little

stream that ran past the town ; and as he looked in the fire a fish of fabulous size appeared to him to come up on the end of his rod, but when he brought him to land the stomach seemed very big ; and when the fish opened its mouth Lawyer Smith walked out, saying it was very cold in the fish's belly, and had it not been for a precedent, Jonah to wit, he would never have ventured in the matter ; and Robert remembered no more.

Jane Parkhouse was the only one awake, and she also saw dreams in the fire that, instead of the future, showed the past. She saw a girl in a clean cotton dress make her curtsy before a young lady of resplendent beauty, and when she found courage to look up, a pair of soft grey eyes seemed to invite love and devotion. One of the flames shot up a little, and she saw a wedding party leave Littledale Church (the young lady had married Squire Maunder, the great man of the neighbourhood) ; the old Grange, not deserted, but resounding with cheerful sound of human voices ; two little toddling figures tumbled over the lawn in front, and then a third baby was brought to the window to look at her brothers. But a great

silence came over the old house, as the gentle mistress was lying ill. One doctor said it was one disease with a good long Latin name, and another said it was another. But Jane knew it was a very old-fashioned complaint that was carrying off the brightest flower from the stem—a broken heart; neglect; and, worse than this, her husband's visits to London, whence he always returned peevish and irritable, and on the slightest whim returned again for another long absence, till one day a letter directed to her husband was accidentally opened by his wife, which told her the London establishment was not without a lady to take the head of the table. The room seemed to shine very cold now, as the fire burnt low, and Jane saw a funeral train move out of the front door. "Dust to dust, ashes to ashes;" but before the last act had been played out, she saw a loved mistress leave the worse than orphans to her care and kindness, and through the long years that intervened her walk day by day had been the bearing of burdens almost too heavy to be borne. The drunken orgies and filthy surroundings had passed by without soiling her soul; the great and perfect

bond of love between her and the dead had kept her true to her trust, like the spices of Araby the Blest that preserved the loved form sweet and changeless on the banks of old Nile beneath the eternal Pyramids.

It was almost dark, the fire had nearly gone out, and she saw the splendid furniture swept away room by room, to pay for some drunken folly. She saw scarcity enter the household, while the master revelled with boon companions. The fire sunk down in total darkness; the candle had gone out; everything seemed dull, silent, cold, and dreary; and the stillness of the night, the regular breathing of her charges, all disposed Jane to sleep, when a loud knock aroused all four to the extreme of wakefulness. Again it was repeated. No fear of robbers; the house was too well known to be empty. Again and again was the wild summons repeated. Jane Parkhouse cried out, in terror of she knew not what, "Who's there?"

"Me! Let me in; I want to see Mrs. Parkhouse."

"Who are you?"

"I am Harold Smith."

When Mrs. Parkhouse opened the front door, she saw Harold Smith looking very white and haggard, as with his hand he motioned to her to come nearer. She thought he had been drinking. So he had, but he was sober now, as he asked in a thick, husky voice—

“What time did Mr. Maunder come home?”

“He is not home yet, sir.”

“My God!” said Harold, “then it was not a dream!”

“What did you say was not a dream?”

“Nothing, nothing,” said Harold; and as he turned with a shudder to go, the village clock struck *one*.

Mrs. Parkhouse was left vainly looking out into the night, with three forms crowding round her, as a dog began to howl and rattle his chain in the rear of the premises.





CHAPTER III.

THE Feathers blazed with light, putting out of countenance the feeble glimmer of private houses that twinkled in the gloaming with feeble radiance. John Tyack sat at the head of the table, surrounded by the various frequenters. In Littledale the whole male population used some public or other. In the bar-parlour, politics, local matters, and town news were discussed. There was, of course, the acknowledged wit, whose pleasantries consisted, for the most part, of sundry well-seasoned jokes that, like wine, increased in worth and mellowness with age. In an age of penny papers, telegrams, and kindred inventions, we can only form a dim idea of what the bar-parlour was to our ancestors. Only in the dim recesses of some village far from the line of traffic is the old bar-

parlour to be seen, and then only in a fossil state, frequented by three or four old men who have been accustomed to it all their lives, and cannot “make fresh tracks” so late in the day.

There are two classes of men, the most visionary of any and yet the most practical, who do so much to improve the condition of everyday life, and yet never look at it. The first are those who look back to what never happened, and the others look forward to what never can happen. The one looks back to the parlour of the village inn, painted in the bright and lovely colours of distant fancy ; the other looks forward to a time when men shall no more seek enjoyment or benefit from the use of stimulants of any kind than they will settle down of an evening to a light and instructive treatise on the third toe of a fossil megatherium recently dug up in Timbuctoo. The amelioration that has been wrought is wonderful, but not all to the good, as the farmer no longer marches at the head of his men to be first in cutting the corn ; the labourer no longer sits at his master’s fire. No longer is he considered one of the family, no longer does his employer share his griefs and sorrows, and the

farmer moves from one farm to another when he sees an opportunity of apparently benefiting himself. No longer, or very seldom, do father, son, and son's son cultivate the same land. But, on the other hand, the labourer's children have very likely become farmers on their own account in the colonies, if they are industrious. The reaping machine, superintended by an intelligent mechanic, at high wages, makes one day do instead of six. True, the mechanic shares not the home of his employer; there is less blind deference to rank and more to intellect; and the mechanic in his comfortable cottage, surrounded by his children growing up around him, is more likely to be respected, because respecting himself, than the hind in his master's kitchen. It is very likely that, mounted on his comfortable reaper, with the pleasant sound of the full sheaves falling behind in regular order, he may lift up his heart in thankfulness to the Lord of all, who has blessed the earth in giving fruitful seasons—very much more likely than when wearily sweating under a back-breaking sickle. Life, like fermenting wine, has the yeasty, unconsidered theories of every age upon

the surface of its society ; the lees are left as it is changed from one cask to another ; and as we look back through the corridors of time, the dregs are left behind, most likely with heaps of yeasty froth on their tops. Some can only see the dregs ; some can see only the froth that, glittering with prismatic rays, casts a fictitious glamour on the distant prospect of past centuries that, like a row of empty casks, have had the bubbling life poured from them. It is useless to try and bring back what is past ; we cannot fill again the empty casks that dwell in the shadows of the past, nor can we tell the shape or fashion of the cask that will hold the sparkling life of a future age.

In the bar-parlour all was mirth and cheerfulness, as the landlord sat giving his sage ideas, or some skilled politician prognosticated the diagnosis of some coming event, oblivious of the fact that the newspaper he had seen it in three months before was then six months old, and that time had drawn up the curtain on the play, very probably let it down and cleared the stage for the next piece long ago. What throne can compare to the seat of the landlord in the dim past ? He was all but

despotic, with few exceptions, and one of these occurred when he was wanted. His wife came and whispered in his ear that Mr. Maunder wanted a private room. The face of John clouded; he had a long score he would fain see settled, but he had never pressed for it, knowing as he did the state of things at the Grange, and dimly conscious that a great deal of money had been got rid of at the Feathers. He bustled out into the bar proper, and as he turned the corner he saw the bottom of a glass rising in the air rapidly, as the person drinking exhausted the contents. It soon came down, and Maunder, in a voice somewhat cleared by the liquor, said—

“ Well, John, let me have my account; I will pay it at once.”

“ Very well, sir; I can show it to you in my book, and can send you the details to-morrow.”

“ Then let me see it.”

The account-book was produced, and the columns added up by Mrs. Tyack. John always left the accounts to his better half, who certainly *made* them up. But then, as she argued to herself, when people wanted to make “ beasts ” of them-

selves, the more it cost the less frequently were they likely to repeat the amusement, and being a clever woman of business in a general way, she soon made the discovery that a very drunken customer is one of the licensed victualler's worst enemies; he frightens those who might be inclined to drop in, and enforces extreme moderation on all beholders with a voice that speaks to the common sense of all. With a voice like a trumpet, clear, loud, and unmistakable, Mrs. Tyack added up column after column, and having entered the total at the side of the book, to save time when the bill was asked for next, said, with a bland smile—

“Ninety-two pounds, three shillings, and four-pence.”

Mauder was surprised. We are all surprised when the bill is presented for past pleasures, and tavern bills have been from time immemorial the standard example *par excellence*. So, with a lofty frown, he counted out ninety-three pounds; and bidding the hostess keep the change, he walked with his old swagger into the private room prepared for him, followed by four kindred spirits

he had picked up as he came along. They had been inclined to resent his secession from their company, but had been graciously pleased to forgive him when he promised to stand treat as he was wont to do.

In the pages of the novelist, characters are represented as nursing revenge for past real or fancied slights, and brooding over them ; but in real life, such a life-long absorption in one idea would end in a madhouse. Nevertheless, there is quite a respectable lot of spite in the world that people can wreak as they tranquilly pursue their way in life. Mrs. Tyack had been a very pretty girl, and had looked at one time to be Mrs. Maunder. She became, instead, Mrs. Tyack. Would she poison Maunder, or use cold steel ? Certainly not ; but she would put a bowl of punch down as two, and so take a very profitable, if quiet, revenge. As money comes in the knife goes out. Do not twelve good and true men ever and anon reward an injured husband for the loss of his wife with a sum of money about equal to six months' income, for his zeal in recording his own shame on oath ?

The bell of the private room rang. “A bowl

of punch, a bottle of brandy, and look sharp!" said the entertainer.

John went out to give the necessary orders, and busied himself with procuring the ingredients; and as the spirit dropped into the steaming compound, John paused and hesitated. But the recollection of a certain coarse assumption of superiority Maunder always assumed passed through his mind. The doubt was gone as quickly as the light summer cloud passes across the face of the bright noonday sun. The last drop of liquor descended; the bowl was taken in with the bottle of fiery spirit.

"Lock the door," said Maunder to one of his companions, who, winking to another, complied.

Cards were then produced, and gold and silver began to cover the table. Noisy exclamations of joy or execration followed one another with great rapidity, as game after game succeeded one another, till, having sat some hours, the leader of the human sponges, Isaac Compton by name, apparently blind with rage at small losses, said—

"Nothing less will I play for than one hundred down!"

The heap of money at Maunder's right hand had increased.

"Right!" said he. "I will play you, Isaac."

The other three declined the higher stakes, and sat watching the players. The first game terminated with the defeat of Isaac, who screamed out—

"Double or quits."

Mauder, with a look of incipient triumph, agreed.

Another game gave success to Isaac. Again the cards were shuffled and cut. Again Isaac won. The liquor and lust of gain made the head of Mauder throb with painful force; his heart beat with wild pulsations that, if reckoned by his feelings, seemed as if to burst his breast. Thrice more the cards were dealt, shuffled, and cut. Each game Isaac was a winner.

A fourth game was now begun; and as Mauder raised the cup of liquor to his feverish mouth and burning lips, his eyes apparently fixed on the vanishing liquid but really watching his adversary, an admirably simulated hickup completing the illusion, a card dropped from Isaac's sleeve and was quietly transferred to his heap, while one of the dealt cards was dexterously shot beneath the table. Again and again was the trick repeated.

Maunder rang the bell.

"I want more liquor. Unlock the door."

Isaac shifted uneasily.

Maunder, apparently half drunk, said, "Do as I tell you."

John Tyack entered.

"Look under the table; that scoundrel has been cheating," said the entertainer of the evening, pointing at Isaac.

John looked, and sure enough underneath were little heaps of cards, which on investigation proved to be all of small value, while the sleeve of Isaac showed quite a *corps de reserve* of kings, queens, and aces.

"Turn him out!" said John Tyack.

"No; let me kick him out, so that he shall know what it is to play with gentlemen."

The other confederates in the room until now had been doubtful which side to espouse, but the word "gentlemen" settled the question.

Maunder, rushing across the room, cheered by sympathetic murmurs, clutched Isaac by the collar. A struggle in the passage followed; Isaac twisted and turned like an eel. The strength of Maunder

was, however, apparently successful, as eventually, when shot into the street, Isaac ran with surprising swiftness in the direction of the mill that lay at the lower end of the town. Maunder walked into the house a victorious hero, in his own belief. Proudly stepping into the parlour, he recapitulated the events of the evening with becoming pride.

"And now, gentlemen," said he, "allow me——"

What he intended to say no one knew for certain. A wild expression of dismay, fear, and then hate crossed his face. He saw it all. Isaac had in the struggle stolen the bag of gold from the capacious pocket of his coat and made off. The triumph was a fancied one, after all; the cheat had secured his prize. Wildly calling on the name of his late antagonist, Maunder rushed out of the house and down the street. He was not so drunk but he perfectly knew the direction taken by the thief. The empty streets echoed to his flying footsteps.

The company at the Feathers were not a wit disconcerted. The excitement caused quite a run on the malt liquor. Mr. Price, the auctioneer, said "he never knowed such a start in his life."

Harold Smith, who always expected his friends to believe the polite fiction that his tremendous exertions in his father's office during the day—attendance on the average of two and a half hours — necessitated a little relaxation, was sitting opposite. He remarked, “It was quite a romance.”

Mr. Spears, the pastrycook, whose hand shook in quite a painful manner, especially of a morning, said, “I never believed no fictions, 'cause I never read them ; when I reads, I reads sense,” in which case the quantity of sense to be read in Littledale must have been painfully small.

Harold was not a bad-hearted young fellow, especially when warmed with liquor. He proposed an adjournment to see the end ; some said they would accompany him, others preferred to sit still.

Harold, Price, and Spears walked rapidly down the street towards the mill. All was silent and still. The clocks had long since tolled twelve as, after a vain and desultory search, they came back to the mill, having traversed several fields and by-roads in an unavailing manner. As they stood

under the shadow of the mill, a top window opened; the head of old Bates, the miller, was protruded, and a cracked, thin voice demanded—

“Now then, are you throwing sommut else in there again? I’ll hide ‘ee, I will.”

A laugh rose from the lips of Spears and Price, but with a suddenly sobered face Harold held something aloft in the moonlight. It was a hat. They all recognized it as Mauder’s hat. A cry of genuine horror and fear greeted the discovery.

Old Bates was the least discomposed. He wanted to go back to sleep; so with a fertility of invention quite wonderful on so short a notice, he said—

“Dare say squire’s gone home all right, but lost his hat.”

Harold waited to hear no more, but darted off to the Grange. Spears and Price went home to bed; they had business to attend to on the morrow, they told one another as they went home.

The eastern sky blushed with the coming morning. As the sun began to warm the earth with his bright golden beams, the miller got up, dressed,

and descended to the mill. Before he put the wheel in motion a white face on the water arrested his attention, and with a hook he drew out the body from the dam. There was the mortal clay that had once been filled with the spirit of James Maunder, but the soul had passed away in the night under the dark shadows of the mill-dam. He had missed his footing in the dark, when trying to cross the little slippery bridge, across which no doubt Isaac had preceded him a short time before. It was the nearest way to the London road.

Yes, there floated the empty tenement in the mill-dam that yesterday contained an immortal soul. When he had first fallen in, a desire for life caused him to struggle fiercely, dashing aside the water. His head rose above the surface for an instant; a wild hope of life passed through his brain; but, sinking again, memory gave a flash that illumined the past. His wasted life rose before him dark and drear; a shuddering fear for the future succeeded. The sound of rushing waters was in his ears; a few laboured pulsations, and all was quiet. The sin-

laden spirit winged its way ; the bark was launched on the ocean of eternity that laves the shores of time, and unknown to all, save One, whether to sink beneath its load of sin or be wafted by gales of mercy to the islands of the blest.





CHAPTER IV.

HAROLD SMITH, with a wild cry, had dashed away from the Grange straight to his house, with the intention of rousing his father, under a vague idea he could do something. His father informed him, on being aroused out of a comfortable sleep at 1.30 a.m., that it was no affair of his; that if Harold had not been guzzling at the Feathers, he would not have been mixed up in it; that he had better go to bed, unless he chose to go and knock up Jones, who lodged with a shoemaker named Elgood, in the next street. Harold bounded off, leaving his father in a perturbed state of mind, which quickly passed off as he reflected that now the formal taking possession of land and tenements, etc., that belonged to the deceased could be more expeditiously and quietly performed. He was sorry

for the children; but, then, it was the law. He had purchased the estate, and they must go; very glad to do something for them, but what that something was he had not determined before a graceful *obbligato* on the nasal trumpet proclaimed that Joshua was asleep.

Maurice Jones, on being aroused, became very wide awake indeed. He descended to the ground floor and knocked at the door of a back room. A voice from within demanded in no very pleasant tone what he wanted; but on being informed his lodger wanted him, a sound as of garments being hastily assumed eventuated in the arrival of a man past middle life, with a bare head, except where a fringe of grizzled hair grew round it, like the belt of vegetation that lies below the snow-covered top of some mountain height; a rather small but firm mouth, between the parted lips of which two rows of teeth appeared, which insensibly reminded the spectator of the moss-grown stones that surround some village well at the side of the road. The leather apron of his craft hid nearly the whole of his body, except where a pair of sinewy arms, nearly the colour of the leather he worked on, ter-

minated in a pair of hands of yet deeper shade, wrinkled but spare, with nervous fingers. His bronzed appearance, but intelligent forehead and piercing eyes, gave the idea, so commonly met with, of a man of whom more might apparently have been made. We are constantly forgetting that, when our great Captain shall reward all according to their deserts, it is not the fifes and drums of human nature which make the noise that will be found to have done most in the battle-field; that those who patiently march and fight the good fight through doubt and darkness will stand higher when the sun of love and truth shall have risen above the horizon; and that when the battle of this life is over, some of the rank and file will stand in the great review as commanders and leaders. Perhaps among the myriad bright and splendid worlds that stud the endless ether, they may lead their Master's forces to fresh victories, or may rule as vicegerents over new and brighter realms of peace and glory.

The three sat and talked long and earnestly, until the "east was grey," when, by the advice of Matthew Elgood, Harold went home. Maurice

Jones went to have an early bath to make up for the want of sleep. When he returned he found the house empty. Matthew had wended his way with steps that showed no sign of faltering or indecision, to the Grange, where he found Jane Parkhouse in a state of mind bordering on distraction. The children had dropped to sleep on the settle once more; the ashes of the fire looked cold and grey in the garish morning light. Chanticleer had long since proclaimed the day an accomplished fact; the dew stood on the fields and hedgerows in diamond drops of glittering radiance. How often does the bruised heart mentally reproach the bright morning for not sympathizing in its sorrow, when Nature is preaching to the misjudging sufferer that the future, and not the past, is the home of the soul!

Matthew approached the open door, not feeling certain whether to ring or not, but was relieved to see Mrs. Parkhouse approaching. In reply to her anxious inquiries, he told all he knew with a tact and kindness one would hardly have expected from the rough outside.

“What can I do?” said Jane, when the narration was complete.

"I should light the fire and get some breakfast ; empty stomachs are bad councillors."

She looked at him, but he had turned away, and bending over the three sleeping forms his lips moved ; but no sound came till near the close, and then the name of "Eunice" softly uttered. With his apron and right hand he removed the traces of emotion that still shook his frame violently. Actuated by a sudden impulse, Jane took his left hand and kissed it with the lowly reverence that a subject may use to her sovereign. He understood the action in the simplicity of a faithful heart. They talked again in low tones, till Robert, moving in his slumber, aroused his brother and sister, who, waking, rubbed their eyes. Jane busied herself with the tasks of the household. Soon the remains of the last night's supper were either removed or supplemented with the poor adjuncts the house afforded for a scanty breakfast, which was partaken of in comparative silence. James looked at his hat hanging on a nail ; but Matthew, understanding the inquiring glance, said—

" You will not go to school to-day."

All three looked at the two silent figures, and

suddenly a great silence fell on all. The orphans felt there was no further need of explanation—that some great trouble had fallen upon them. The tears rose in Clara's eyes, but the two brothers sat in silence ; they felt the bright and pleasant land of childhood had been left behind them, never more to return ; when the doorway was darkened by a fresh arrival. All looked up, and Joshua Smith stepped in with a mixture of haste and yet hesitation in his gait.

" You are out early," said he to Matthew, as if he felt he must say something.

Matthew did not respond, but looked at the lawyer with no friendly eyes. Joshua understood the glance. Looking in return with a steady, not to say contemptuous, manner at the other—

" Can I speak to you a minute ? " he said, addressing Jane, " I should be glad to do so."

The two went into what was called by courtesy the library. It was littered with various odds and ends. The chairs were mostly encumbered with old spurs, whips, portions of harness, broken straps, etc. An open escritoire was filled with old letters. About six or seven books, mostly odd volumes of

old romances, some with no covers ; a broken pipe or two ; sundry cups, many with no handles, completed the furniture, with the exception of three or four broken chairs, which seemed a proper accompaniment to those that stood upright covered with rubbish. The one vacant standing chair was in front of the escritoire.

Joshua cleared his throat, and made what was for him a long speech.

" You see, Mrs. Parkhouse, Mr. Maunder yesterday called on me and completed the transfer of his property. It was all mortgaged beyond its value before. I don't know what relations there may be ; they had better be communicated with, as the children have nothing, unless indeed Mr. Maunder had a sum of money put by somewhere. If it is in the house, it belongs to me. But I waive that claim : if there is anything found, they shall have it. With regard to yourself, you can remove your private property as soon as convenient after the funeral, which I suppose will take place in a day or two. In any case I wish the house cleared a week after. I have no doubt you think me a hard man and everything wicked, but if I had not

bought the property some one else would. I gave more than any one else ; it is mine. But if there is the slightest doubt in your mind, I shall be happy to show the receipts and deeds to any respectable member of my profession, or any one you or the relations may think proper. With regard to the personal estate of the deceased, I do not think it will pay even the debts in full ; but I will, if agreeable, take the management and conduct it in the cheapest possible manner. I shall expect to hear from you in a 'day or two. Good day." And he was gone.

Jane Parkhouse still stood as if turned to stone ; the truth had been worse than she ever, in her wildest dreams, had thought possible. She had often looked forward to poverty with her charges till things were put right, but never to destitution. A burning weight was on her forehead, a fever coursed through her veins, but she seemed incapable of moving. Matthew Elgood heard Joshua Smith depart, and came in ; she saw him, but she could not speak. He, hastily going out, returned with a cup of water in his outstretched hand. She felt incapable of taking it.

He held it out; she, as if in a dream, saw a hand extended to take it. It appeared like her own, she could not tell. The hand dropped the cup, which, breaking on the floor with a crash at her feet, broke the spell, and a flood of tears relieved the pent-up feelings.

In a few minutes Mrs. Parkhouse recovered herself sufficiently, in fact completely. As the dash of cold water at first chills, but afterwards warms the swimmer, so Jane felt that the whole of her energies must be brought to bear on the present emergency. Various wild schemes passed through her mind as she stood in the littered, dusty, and untidy room. Suddenly a thought flashed across her mind: Why not tell her perplexities to Matthew, who still stood silent and apparently unobservant of anything? It took but an instant, but she saw the children now without a protector.

"Oh, Mr. Elgood, what could you advise in the matter?"

"I could advise a good deal, but would you take my advice? It is no use to go and talk of what I tell you, as that would defeat the object."

Jane Parkhouse's face was sufficient answer, as she looked at the shoemaker.

"Very well," said he, nodding his head; "take a seat. They," pointing in the direction of the kitchen, "are gone to hunt for eggs in the plantation. Now, excuse me, have you ever received any wages?"

"No," said Jane. "He promised me I should have it in a lump; but I don't want it."

"Don't want it! Stuff! You can give it away," said he, with the ghost of a twinkle in his eye.

Jane comprehended what he meant, which was that, although the ship was wrecked, a few spars might yet be saved.

They held a long and earnest colloquy, which was followed by Mrs. Parkhouse and Matthew Elgood sitting down and drawing out a very respectable bill for wages, etc. Although it was not once clearly stated, they both understood it was to save some trifle for James, Robert, and Clara.

Joshua Smith was surprised to receive in the course of the day a bill amounting to £850, wages due to Jane Parkhouse; and until the claim was

settled—so her note said—she declined to leave the Grange. He quite opened his eyes, but in a minute a crafty expression swept over his face. “I see,” he murmured; “she wants to be bought like the rest.” He estimated every one at his own standard, and imagined every one as base as himself.

Astronomers tell us that portions of the starry ether have not been reached by beams of light which shone from this earth at Creation. If, therefore, we were able on spirit pinions to reach that spot, the sight of this globe would just become visible when light shone over the departing chaos. A few myriad of miles nearer, we should be met by the view of tangled and primæval forests, inhabited by the loathsome things that crawled or flew over a damp, unwholesome earth, that exhaled a hot and fetid vapour in the rays of the burning sun. A few myriad of miles nearer would give the empires of old, when might trampled over right, till they sank beneath the weight of their own corruption. A few myriad of miles nearer still would give Judæa, with its awfully affecting pictures, speaking of hope and love to the down-trodden

millions of the earth. Joshua could only view the chaos of geological ages. He could not understand the music of love moving the human heart; his thoughts and passions were like the monsters of primæval creation, that only lived to kill and mutilate the quivering forms that fell into their power.

To an offer of half, Jane sadly responded, "Seventeen years of faithful service are, I think, worth more," but took the money.

The Grange was invaded by an army of men under the command of Price, the auctioneer, who pulled and shifted the furniture in all sorts of queer combinations. In ten days' time the rostrum was set up in the large empty dining-room, which rang all day with "Going, going, gone!" The next day all sorts of vehicles removed the last reliques, and straw was strewn on the doorstep. The coroner's inquest had brought in a verdict of "Found drowned" on the body of James Maunder. The evening's festivities that ended in the tragedy had been sifted in vain, and John Tyack threatened with the loss of his license. A bill, hoisted on a shaky board, announced in front of the Grange—

"This desirable freehold mansion to be let or sold.—Apply," etc.

The Board of Guardians sat as usual on the first Tuesday in the month, when, after the usual discussion on the price of grain, etc., the question turned up, what to do with James and Robert Mauder, who had not been relegated to "the House." Many of the guardians had dined at the Grange, and a feeling of sorrow, lasting exactly two minutes, had sat in the hearts of several. Every one thought every one else ought to do something. Those who had families thought, in justice to their families, they could do nothing; those who were single thought the same, in justice to themselves.

Joshua Smith was absent. He was afraid of being asked; but as he managed the legal business of most of them, and some owed him money, a prudent reserve on expressions of opinion was visible throughout.

The Rev. Jonas Cartwright suggested a sum should be given to Matthew Elgood, who, he understood, had given all three orphans shelter and food. Mr. Inigo Green, tailor and Freethinker,

opposed, not on the merits of the case, but because he always opposed every motion made by what he called "long-tailed blacks." The discussion waxed loud ; each speaker diverged in a manner that threatened to make it endless ; when the porter hurriedly entered, exclaiming—

" Gentlemen, Matthew Elgood desires an audience of the Board."

The clerk drew a heap of returns before him, and tried to sift the wheat from the chaff of formulas, when Matthew entered.

" You are desired to speak," said Sir Lawrence Bunkum, baronet and chairman.

Matthew, in a few words, said, as the estate of the late James Maunder had proved on investigation insolvent, he desired to have the two boys James and Robert Maunder as apprentices, on receipt of the usual fees given and expected with parish apprentices.

Inigo Green thought a reduction on two would be most proper, which motion was promptly opposed by Price, the auctioneer. A vote on the subject resulted in the ignominious defeat of Inigo, who wrote a letter to the county paper next week, de-

manding that the vulgar display of heedless profusion at the Littledale Board of Guardians should be put an end to ; and thence diverged into the private and past history of two or three guardians in particular, finishing up with a spirited denunciation of the bloated priest who, sucking the blood of the community, battens on his victim's honest earnings. It did no great harm, however, as it never got farther than the editor's waste-paper basket, and eventually lit the office fire.

Clara disappeared from the Littledale horizon in company with Mrs. Parkhouse, nobody seemed to inquire where or how.

James and Robert were in the course of the week bound apprentices to Matthew Elgood, on whom Inigo called at the earliest opportunity, assuring him that with the ten pounds the Board had washed their hands of them entirely. Matthew said nothing, but Inigo still thought he had made an impression. To many people the clack of their own tongue is the most delicious music. If you doubt this, just convince people you hear talking folly of the fact ; they will hate you almost as much as if you had done them a favour.

Months passed, and winter was closing in ; the evenings were getting chilly. It was enough to do to keep one's self warm, and so the memory of the past seemed entirely faded. A mound in the churchyard, rapidly becoming covered with grass, was the most permanent mark apparently left of the dead. But what of those that were left in the world to struggle in the stream of life ? Feeling, thought, and imagination all pass or change, and there remains the daily load of work, the tale of bricks that must be completed. Look at creation. The tree and flower grow out of decay ; so the soul of man is ripened by trial, fallen hopes, and numbed affections. We are what the past has made us. We build the house, but the scaffolding that supports it are the thoughts, feelings, fears, cares, and affections of the years as they roll by ; and when death removes the envelope, the beauty or meanness of the edifice will tell the effect that years have wrought. Yon paltry hut used a scaffolding of the green boughs of pleasure, while another has reared a bright and glorious building, using a heavy cross to support a dome that shall stand among those not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.



CHAPTER V.

FIVE years have rolled away, and Littledale remains very much the same. There is but little movement in these quiet towns. Some of the younger blood has pushed its way into more busy regions, and has either fallen by the wayside or conquered in the strife.

Matthew Elgood, to the astonishment of all who knew him, seemed to have a new stock of life and spirit shortly after the arrival of his two apprentices. A new window had been put to the parlour, and quite a display of boots and shoes had made their appearance, from the coarse field boot of the labourer to the aristocratic spring-side. What the spell could be no one in the town could tell, but every year brought Matthew new customers, and, what is more, he kept them. His work was good ; his word could be depended on.

A gentleman in black coat and white tie, with a pale face and rather nervous manner, rapped on the counter. Matthew came forward, and inquired what he could do for him; but with a singularly winning smile, the stranger said—

“I am your new vicar.”

A hearty shake of the hand, and the two men were *en rapport* directly.

“Come, Matthew, I want your assistance. The craft of St. Crispin has always been comprised of a very large number of active brains as well as active fingers. The allotment grounds have at last been completed, and I wish your advice about the applicants.”

“Well, sir, my idea would be that not the very best nor the very worst men should be taken; those at the lowest wages should have the first chance.”

“Certainly. I wish the allotments to be an inducement to sobriety. The money to repair the fence and make the road has all been promised; but” (feeling in his pocket) “I find I have left the list at home. Come to my house this evening, and we can talk the matter over at greater length.”

Matthew promised, and the Rev. Cyrus Clark

walked away. Six months before, the old vicar, the Rev. Jonas Cartwright, had died. The new vicar had arrived a month before, and in a fortnight had taken a pretty good guess at the wants of Littledale. He found the bulk of the men, the day's work being done, had no inducement to either remain at home or abstain from the public-house. He knew that reading-rooms were the best remedy, but, until the bucolic mind was educated to it, a vain hope. A Chinese artist would be sorely out of place at the Royal Academy; the glorious forms that seem instinct with life on the canvas would be to him a nearly sealed book. So the vicar saw that something else must be thought of, and allotment grounds appeared to him the best thing under the circumstances. A piece of land was soon rented and divided into pieces, and offered at a rent that seemed to the Littledale intellect a thing to be desired. Every one nearly of the class the vicar desired, and many others he did not desire, made application for "bits," as they were termed; every one of the subscribers who was in trade expected a piece, and between the lot he was fairly puzzled. Here was John Guy, the ironmonger, who had a

garden and orchard, and as he had given five shillings, he expected a full-sized piece. Price, the auctioneer, wished a piece that he might let to one of his men, to hold during his (Price's) good pleasure; the man had recently asked for a rise of a shilling per week, and Price thought it would be a good thing to stave off the idea of an advance in that way. And so on, through the list of subscribers.

The Rev. Cyrus Clark had drank his tea in his quiet home; the tray was not yet cleared away when Matthew was announced.

Between the two men, so dissimilar in appearance, there seemed a bond that neither could explain, which mentally drew them together. Had they analyzed the feeling, it would most likely have escaped their notice. The most subtle and powerful essences cannot be detected by the most practised operator, not even in the vapour that clouds the bell-glass on the top of the crucible. The bright radiance of a life-long, noble purpose raised the aims, brightened the intellect, and ennobled the thoughts of Matthew Elgood to a degree unsuspected by himself and the world around him,

and it was only when brought in contact with a noble and educated character that he seemed holding converse with an equal. Greatness of soul knows nothing of the petty distinctions that engage the thoughts of the many. The leading cow in the Swiss pastures imagines she is the most esteemed in the herd because she bears a tinkling bell around her neck, but the master of the herd most highly prizes the cow that gives most milk. The cow with the bell *may* give the least of any.

The vicar and Matthew having gone through the list of names, Matthew said, “Sir, I do not see the name of any on the list but what a piece of garden will be a great benefit to. The time and money at present wasted in the public-house, I hope, will be so no more.”

The giving of rational pursuits and amusements is the hope of the present time; the rude pleasures and drunken festivities of a bygone age were only fit for the warrior who believed in an endless drunken brawl in the halls of Valhalla. The education of the present day ought to be higher than it is in every way, when we look at the thousand and one channels of improvement.

The people will never be thoroughly taught until it is taken up by the State, and as such made compulsory. Schools are cheaper than prisons. The great difficulty is this—that each class really, when they talk of equality with any one, mean with those higher than themselves. For those lower in the social scale there is small sympathy by people at large. A few, and only a few, feel for them. Only three hundred of Gideon's host were deemed worthy to rout the wandering Midianites. When we look at what has been left behind—the chains of slavery cast aside ; the ocean, instead of dividing, binding nations as a great highway ; the lightning from heaven carrying the words of one nation to another at the ends of the earth in an instant of time—well may we be proud. But when we see the ploughman, who supplies the loaf, below the intelligence of the man who eats it—the sailor and his vessel a plaything, either to sink or swim as the gain of a distant master dictates—it is humbling that so fair a prospect should show such dark spots.

“I am puzzled,” said the Rev. Cyrus, “that you should be content, with your feelings and

aspirations, to remain in such a quiet place, when in a larger sphere your talents would open a path to fame and position. I do not say riches, as I am sure you would be above such paltry considerations as gold for its own sake."

"Well," said Matthew, "I had ambition once, but it is gone."

"No, not gone, only purified. Such a soul as yours could not lose itself in the routine of everyday life."

"Perhaps not," said Matthew. "But I feel I could ask you a great favour. It is not every one I could, but you, sir, seem to feel for all in such a way as I hardly know how to describe."

"Speak, and if I can assist you in any way I shall be glad and happy to do it."

"Well, sir, I feel I wish to tell you a story, and when you have heard it you will see, perhaps, what I wish you to undertake for me."

The vicar motioned with his hand ; he seemed unwilling, by word of mouth, to interrupt the course of Matthew's speech. As he sat in his chair, a little drawn from the table, he seemed like some bright spirit about to receive a high commission of

mercy and trust. He was about the middle height, with brown hair that curled at the tips, thrown back from his high white forehead ; a pair of grey eyes that spoke of depths of almost womanly tenderness ; a nose but little curved from the straight Grecian line ; and a mouth that was covered by two red lips, whose curve in their centre looked hardly determined enough for the intellectual brow above. His hands, with long nervous fingers, were clasped over one knee, which gave him the appearance of being very attentive to what he expected to hear.

Matthew cleared his throat thrice before he was able to begin. When he did, it was in a hesitating and rather feeble voice ; but as he proceeded, the spirit of his narrative made the voice fuller and more audible. But whether sunk or raised, not a syllable was lost by his entranced auditor.

“ I was brought up in the village of Sleaforth, four miles away from Littledale, until I was seven years old, when my uncle moved into the town. He was a shoemaker like myself ; I learnt my trade of him. He never allowed any slackness, and was penurious in the extreme, but a wonderful

head for money. Nothing ever tempted him to an unsound investment; nothing he invested in turned out badly; but the circumscribed size of his field of operations, and the efforts he had to make to get a little money to begin with, caused him to regard every penny he spent as a waste. He was very great at buying in kind. That is a practice many people have never heard of. A man wanted boots for his family; my uncle supplied on credit, but took a chest of drawers, perhaps, as security. He charged no interest, because he could not legally do so, but he charged so much a week for warehousing the furniture, or whatever the nature of the security might be. Some of his dealings were, I am afraid, even worse. I have seen dresses and ornaments disposed of by wives for boots without their husbands' knowledge, and in a day or two the unworn boots would be sold to my uncle as a separate transaction, either to tide over a temporary emergency or to go in liquor. I never spoke to my uncle about the traffic, or he to me; we were ashamed to own how bad it was. I did not myself ever conduct any bargains, but I hugged myself in secret on the money so acquired. My uncle was

delighted that, instead of wishing to wander off in pursuits more usual with youth, I stuck to work. Morning, noon, and night, the benches in my uncle's shop rang with the sound of the hammer and lapstone. I was fast sinking into a mere animal, fighting with my fellows for little bits of yellow dirt. I was worse than my uncle, for he saved for me. He never looked forward to enjoy money himself; he wished me to be rich, and consequently, as he supposed, respected. Those who have never known the biting tooth of poverty have no conception of what it is to be really poor. It is not the actual want of bread, but the feeling of inferiority induced by the behaviour of those better off. The contumely that cannot be resented sinks into the heart. I have read that the Crusaders, at the fall of Constantinople, broke up priceless gems of art, bronze statues, the fragments of which are the admiration of succeeding ages, that they might be cast into coins of the lowest denomination. I have often thought that the grinding sense of poverty equally breaks up the beauty of the soul, that it may traffic in the lowest thoughts and basest actions of humanity.

"I was sinking fast into the most despicable of characters, that of a *young* man who loves money for its own sake, when I was saved in so wonderful a manner that I have never doubted the goodness of God since, however dark and dismal things may look for the present. Among my uncle's numerous clients was a young man who had every vice but that of open-handedness. His father was dead; his mother had died years before. He often came to make a time bargain when he wanted shoes, but never succeeded. My uncle knew him to be false at the core. John Penny had cheated and deceived every one else, or nearly so, at one time or another. To the astonishment of all the town, one day John had a new coat of whitewash put on the house he dwelt in; the dirty interior was cleaned out; fresh muslin curtains put in the windows; a few flowers decked the sill. He then left the key with a neighbour, saying he should be back in a day or two, as he was going to visit his sister. In two days' time he appeared in the dusk with a cart laden with furniture. A female figure sat in front, and John walked by the shafts. Early the next morning,

curiosity still being on tiptoe, unusual signs of prosperity appeared at John's cottage. Meat and vegetables, in quantity and quality he had long been a stranger too, groceries, etc., were fetched, bought and paid for. Still no sign appeared, till in the afternoon the carriage of the squire called, and took John and his sister up to the Grange. The squire is dead now, but I can't help thinking it was all his money that furnished John's house. I was interested in the gossip. Uncle always encouraged me to learn all I could. He always said that when people gossipped they had only time to exaggerate, not invent; that the beginning was always true, but the end always false. With all his faults, my uncle, Bill James, as he was always called, was a clever and close observer of the worst side of human nature. Gossip said the squire was going to marry John's sister, and John was to live at the Grange.

"I had gone one evening for a walk down the fields opposite, to call on a farmer for an account. My uncle always kept short reckonings; he said if the boots were worn out people paid because they could not help themselves, but thought it a robbery,

but while wearing them the money was easier got. I returned by way of the mill. It was a glorious evening ; the sun sank in the west shrouded in clouds of gold. I remember wondering if it were possible that a future generation would be able to coin the gold I saw in the sky, and how profitable the business would be if a man could do it all himself, forgetting, in my stolid ignorance, that the gold in the clouds could buy a brighter hope and more glorious wealth of thought than the gold mines of the whole earth ; that when we look on the bright sunset, so golden and beautiful, it speaks of a bright to-morrow, although the clouds are but the vapours drawn by the power of the sun from the ocean—the record of his day's deeds. So if the end of life shows bright thoughts and good deeds drawn from the ocean of life, we may look for a bright rising when the dark night of death has passed away in the glory of an immortal morning.

“I knocked at Bates the miller’s door, had a cup of cider, received another small account, and walked round the dam to cross the plank, when I found a lady coming the other way. She was

standing on the plank, looking at the setting sun with a rapt, earnest gaze: two lips half parted; blue eyes, that seemed almost grey, that gazed into the glories of the declining day with so eager and intent a look, as if to read some great truth afresh as it came across the bridge of time, or as if to see again that portion of the vision of St. John that speaks of the great city. Instinctively I turned again to the sunset, with eyes cleared of their covering of dross, and saw a bright vision of hope. I seemed to have lived an age in that instant. We often, I fancy, judge very erroneously of time; it is a mere thing of clocks and watches. A slight exclamation of dismay again caused me to look at the bright vision. I saw her parasol had dropped from the half-opened hand, and had floated some distance down the dam. In an instant I was down the bank, and, plunging into the water, recovered it. A look of terror was quickly changed to amusement, as in my dripping state I offered it back.

“ ‘Thank you sincerely, but I fear that you will take cold,’ said the lady.

“ ‘I am not afraid of that; a slight wetting is

not of that importance to me,' I said, with a gaze so ardent that it brought a slight blush to her face, which caused me to wish myself anywhere else, with the strange inconsistency of human nature.

"' Pray go home now and change your things; I will not have you stay to be thanked.' So, with a pretty imperiousness in her manner, she retraced her steps.

"' Where have you been ?' said uncle, when I arrived dripping wet.

"Without an explanation, I hurried upstairs and changed my garments, and quickly presenting myself before my uncle, I handed him the money I had received on his account.

"' Uncle, I want a sovereign,' said I.

" He was too astonished to speak at first. I have no doubt he thought me mad. When he had a little recovered from his astonishment he said, ' What for ? '

"' I want it,' I said.

"' Look here, lad ; you are always a good lad, but it isn't for drink, gambling, or such like ? '

" My contemptuous smile was sufficient answer. He handed me the money with a sigh. As I

hastily deposited it in my pocket, my action reassured him, and gradually I saw him smile. He thought I had a new idea to surprise him with. I had on one or two occasions before asked for small sums to perfect a new idea in shoes before I showed him the result. The rest of the day passed in a whirl of thoughts. I could hardly take account of time ; and when the evening shades came on, our frugal supper seemed like the nectar of Olympus. In a dream I went to bed. In the darkness of the night I thought over the events of the day. Once a thought of greater gain crossed my mind, that I might have more to offer ; but the way I knew and more than suspected it was sometimes made, made me shudder. But I felt none of this about the sovereign ; it seemed *sui generis*, like an offering on the Hebrew altars of old, that lost its earthy taint as the fire consumed it and it became a holy thing.

“ Next morning a few inquiries caused me to be in possession of the fact that the lady was the sister of John Penny. She had been a governess at Salisbury till her brother fetched her home. Love is quick to see, and with a heavy heart I

recollected that Squire Mauder had been to the Salisbury races last month. He might have seen her ; but hope whispered he might not. In the afternoon I strolled through the town, dressed in better clothes. I saw the same streets that I had seen yesterday, but they were changed. As I walked along I saw two men in front ; they were deep in conversation. It was the squire and John Penny. I thought John looked better than usual ; in fact, he was not a bad fellow, and I determined to give him a pair of boots. I turned and went up the town. I bought with the sovereign and some shillings of my own the very best parasol that Littledale contained. I did not see her very many times ; her brother had suddenly got as distant and reserved to me as I had before been to him. What did I care ? I had reason to believe that I was not regarded with indifference, but with a certain amount of regard. But to proceed.

“ Two or three months afterwards I saw John and his sister walk towards the mill. I bethought myself I had better go to work ; and had scarcely sat down to begin when people running caused me to jump up. I ran out and found on inquiry

that Miss Penny had fallen in the dam while walking with her brother, and that Squire Maunder, who happened to be there, had pulled her out. The next day I hurt myself and went to bed. A fever supervened, and it was two months' time before I could go out. I have thought since, 'If I could have had some one to talk to, I should not have been so ill,' but the repression of all feeling breaks the machinery down; there is no safety-valve. When I could make inquiries without suspicion, I heard that Miss Penny was to marry the squire, and that John seemed to hold his head higher than ever. I was still dreaming, but the dream was nearly at an end—time would have healed or soothed the smart—when I received a visit from John, who handed me my parasol and quickly turned away, as if afraid to trust himself to speak. He came besides for something else, apparently. He began speaking to uncle, to whom he wanted to sell his house for ready money. I knew uncle had been collecting his money together for some time in anticipation of a bad harvest. At those times he frequently lent farmers money to help with the rent. After a long colloquy he left.

I hurried upstairs, and opened the parasol with a kind of vague curiosity. A note dropped out : here it is ; ” and he produced a faded old piece of paper.

“ ‘ DEAR MR. ELGOOD,

“ ‘ I return your parasol with many thanks. John does not wish me to keep it, and I think I had better return it. After Mr. Mauder’s great bravery in pulling me out of the water at the risk of his life, I feel I cannot refuse to accede to his request to give into his keeping the life he saved. I send you, if you will accept of it, a ring. It was my mother’s, with her name engraved inside ; it is the same as my own.

“ ‘ Yours truly,

“ ‘ EUNICE PENNY.’

“ How I lived for many months I know not, neither do I know how I felt ; for they were soon married. Month succeeded month with a dull heavy weight. I burnt the parasol because uncle wanted (having a good opportunity) to sell it. One day the bells rang out a merry peal, and I knew the squire had an heir. Poor James ! his has been a hard lot to endure.

" Some long time afterwards I was out on business for my uncle, having finished which I went home. I found uncle out, but the key was under the door; he had been called for by a neighbour. Waiting his arrival was dull work, and I fell asleep. When I awoke the house was filled with men, and standing in their midst was uncle. They were all talking. The doctor very soon arrived, and began to look at my head. In a vague manner I put my hand up; it came down covered with blood. The exclamations of the neighbours put me in possession of the facts as far as my numbed brain would let me. My uncle on his return had found his money gone, and his nephew apparently dead. Next day I was better, and memory partially returned: a man with blackened face stood behind me, and then I saw, as in a dream, ten thousand stars before my eyes, and again all was blank.

" My uncle was affected by the loss of his money, which was the savings of a lifetime. He had got his feet wet, and in his anxiety for me did not change his shoes; I soon learnt I must lose my best friend in this world. The old man died peacefully with my hand in his. I found among his papers

the title deeds of the house I live in ; it was the house of Eunice. I soon let my old home and began a new life. Standing by the silent dead, I promised, God helping me, to succour Eunice and her child. Two more children quickly followed, but a long illness broke her health and spirits, cheered only by the friendship of her maid, whose name was Parkhouse. When she was quite sure no earthly hope remained, she gave to her faithful but humble friend a bundle of papers to be entrusted to my care, which I have treasured up. They are apparently of no value, but she thought differently, so I have religiously preserved them.

“ The squire I have not mentioned. He in a contemptuous manner desired that I should supply what shoes the household required, but I have never been paid for a single pair. He sank from bad to worse ; the demon of drink had completely taken hold of him, and the lands passed away into the possession of Lawyer Smith. The squire was drowned one night in the same mill-dam he pulled his wife from. His children were penniless when he died, and James and Robert Maunder became the apprentices of myself.

"I am almost come to the end. Mrs. Parkhouse got a situation for herself and niece, as she called her, in the house of a gentleman not very far off—I would rather not tell you his name—and she writes to me that the second son, who is at home, having spent his portion, is paying Clara secret but assiduous court. Could you, sir, do you not think, let them come to you as servants? Mrs. Parkhouse is old but willing; Clara is a useful, clever girl. If you, who do so much, could do this, I ask for no wages. Business has thriven with me, and will, I hope, more so. Save her, I implore you; she is so like her mother, poor girl! I don't think I could die happy if when I saw Eunice beyond the river I could not assure her of her children's welfare. She may be looking down now, praying you to save her child from a bad man and a fate worse than death."

Matthew was so excited he clasped the hand of his listener, but remembering himself would have let it go.

"Let them come to-night, if necessary," said the clergyman, whose eyes were not dry. "Between you and me there can be nothing but sympathy. I will do all you ask; I wish I could do more."

Matthew sat quite silent ; the clergyman saw he was engaged in silent, though fervent, thanksgiving to the Father of all.

The moon had risen, bathing all nature in a flood of silver light. Matthew dashed away the signs of emotion and departed ; but his walk was firm as ever as he went home.

The Rev. Cyrus Clark felt sleep out of the question ; he too went out, and looking on the mill-dam mused long and earnestly—not a vain reverie, but steadfast meditation. There is all the difference between the two that there is between the slender racehorse, a mere instrument of gambling, and the stout roadster that bears an honoured master proudly and safely through long years of faithful service.

“Strange,” he mused half aloud, “that the real voice of a human heart moves all who hear it. The water I see before me is the same as yesterday, but for me it possesses a strange interest. It looks so bright and beautiful in the moonlight, I can never think of it the same as I did before ; it speaks with a thousand tongues. It is not the money value of a bit of dyed fabric that moves our

heart when the standard of our country is waved aloft ; it is the associations that gather round it."

He suddenly felt a chill as another figure crossed the plank and wished him good evening. It was Maurice Jones, Joshua's clerk. He passed and was gone ; but the water looked differently—it seemed cold and dead. The affinities we feel of attraction and repulsion, do they ever err ? Doctors tell us that the healthy give an atmosphere of health, and the sick an atmosphere of disease ; if it is so in the material world, may it not be so in the unseen ? "Take up thy bed and walk," and "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee," fell from the same Divine lips, thereby recognizing a complete resemblance between the seen and the unseen.





CHAPTER VI.

NEXT day Matthew was in the sitting-room at the back of the shop. The happy frugal breakfast had been despatched. The three occupants of the room drew their chairs a little away from the table. James and Robert waited for Matthew to go to work, followed by themselves; instead of that he sat still.

Time had pressed heavily on the faces and spirits of the brothers. They could hardly be mistaken for other than twins. Their great resemblance deepened with age: the same black eyes, straight hair, gaunt frames, and sinewy arms, with a great similarity of dress, heightening the illusion; but their foreheads had not expanded as much as an observer could wish. They had a trifle too keen an air of business to be altogether quite natural. Matthew had never spoken to them of

the future ; and between the brothers a perfect bond subsisted, even to the amalgamation of their petty savings in the dim hope that Clara might one day sit at a table in their company, in their own house. They had never been known to waste a penny or produce one, except when, in Matthew's absence, an impecunious workman had borrowed sixpence, to be repaid at the end of the week by ninepence. Laugh not at the transaction ; when we look at the motive, we can hardly but admire the constancy of purpose. For them there was no relaxation ; overtime was valuable to add to the hoard ; but when little Dick Summers was ill, James and Robert sat up with him without fee or reward. The earliest mushrooms were brought to the invalid's chamber, and bunches of wild flowers, plucked in the Sunday afternoon stroll, often from miles distant, gave the little close chamber a beauty, adding also a freshness to the atmosphere. But to give money was not to be thought of ; that was sacred. The misery at the Grange was too deeply burnt in their memories ; the hope of Clara's society too precious a thing to be delayed even one instant. It was a kind of avarice

of the noblest shade, but still the love of money was there, hardly to be eradicated in after years. So avarice, though tinted with the rainbow hues of affection, still breathes the same blighting influence on the soul, unless checked in certain phases of character. The poisonous flowers of the tropics, though bright and splendid, bear the taint of death to the frame as surely as the pestiferous alleys of some great city; both owe their deadly taint to corruption and decay.

Matthew looked grave. You would hardly have recognized the impassioned man who the night before bowed the heart of his fellow with genuine pathos, in the apparently dry business specimen sitting a little away from the table.

“Five years ago,” said Matthew, “I took two apprentices. They have worked faithfully; I shall give them their reward, but not all at once. Living in the house, I have given small wages, nor could more be expected. But I am going to do more than that. I have discharged the last of my workpeople except John Summers, so I intend to employ no more, but sell more shoes and boots without them.”

The brothers stared, but listened.

“ You remember that last fall I was sorely put to it. The men insisted on one and sixpence more per pair on the boots, and one shilling on the shoes ; time-work rose in proportion. It was the working of a natural law. The country is richer than it was, but not to the extent of such an increase. Even the apprentices got idle, except you, James and Robert. A similar movement pervaded the country. The masters were beaten for the time because they depended on money. They now have sought the assistance of brains, and are more independent than ever ; but it is necessary to brains to work alone, and yet in company. The men are beaten at their own weapons. They said, ‘ Do without us if you can ; ’ and the masters have done without them, by the aid of a mighty force compared to which the swiftest movement of the human hand is dull and powerless.”

“ How ? ” said Robert. “ I don’t see. Shoes must be made. The end of the quarter is near, and we have only half a stock to meet the demand. Servants, and those who take their money quarterly, want their boots all of a push.” ,

"And they shall have them," Matthew returned, with a smile.

"If I and Robert work ever so," said James, "we could not get them done in time."

"Now, attend to me," said Matthew. "I have a great deal to do in a week. You, James, as the elder, will take all the stock out of the window into this room, and display as best you can here. Men will be here from Gibbs the carpenter's in an hour to alter the front. You, Robert, will see no time is lost in getting the shop ready. The workshop and parlour will be thrown into one, with two windows. Are you satisfied to wait my further instruction and orders without questioning?"

Both replied, without hesitation, they would.

"Will you trust me with your savings? I never wronged any one yet," said Matthew.

James, as the elder and custodian, went and returned with a little bag. It contained seventeen pounds, fourteen shillings, and twopence.

"Do you trust me?"

A look came in the faces of each; they felt a confidence of success with all the fervour of youth.

"James will meet me at Salisbury with a

waggon and two horses ; John Summers will drive them to the Wheat-sheaf, where you will find me. Tell him *nothing*," said Matthew, impressively. "As you are silent, so will the reward be. Robert, you will stay at home, but a great pleasure awaits you ; this day week call on the Rev. Cyrus Clark, and give him this letter."

An hour later Matthew left Littledale, in the direction of Salisbury, by the carrier's cart. It was a long journey at four miles an hour, as insisted on by a paternal Government, in order that the blessings of quick locomotion shall be only at the service of the rich, that the poor and ill-fed may experience the rigours of the winter's cold and summer's heat. Some people don't know when they are well off, and cannot assent, if poor, when a rich acquaintance bemoans the snare of riches that has fallen to his lot.

James and Robert both worked well. The new front was put in, and shelves for shoes and boots of all description adorned the windows.

James and John Summers had departed and arrived at Salisbury, meeting Matthew, who had the waggon laden with hampers, and again set

their faces towards Littledale. When they knocked at the door, even Matthew hardly knew it again. Robert had worked to the last, and made the best display he could, but the stock was small.

"Now, boys," said Matthew, "get rid of old John, who is rather knowing, and shut up shop."

The shutters were adjusted in a twinkling. As the two young men, in company with their master, opened the first hamper—it was full of boots and shoes—they looked in wonder. Matthew said to James, "Could you sew a boot like that?"

"No, I could not."

"Of course you can't, because it is pegged, or made by machinery. In future I shall be independent of all chance help, and the repairs will get less and less every year."

James and Robert stared.

"Because boots will get cheaper and less thought off."

The triumph was complete. Nevertheless Matthew thought it strange that Robert said nothing of his visit to the vicarage. He said nothing, however, but watched him with curiosity. Robert was in a hurry with his breakfast next

morning, and chided James that he was so long, customers would be coming in, and Robert's eyes danced. A step was heard ; Robert looked out and said, "Here is a lady. You go, James."

James wondered ; his brother was not usually so lazy ; but he went. A tall, beautiful girl came in, dressed in quiet but good taste. A pair of blue eyes looked at him in a confidential way quite frightening. A wealth of brown hair showed even under the bonnet. Regular and beautiful features lit by a smile caused James's memory to come to his aid, and merrily rushing, he kissed the customer, exclaiming, "Little Clary's come, Robert ! Come out."

Robert came laughing, saying, "I saw Clara last night ; but some one else is not far off."

Another figure advanced as both together said, "Parky's home again. Hurrah !" And notwithstanding their patriarchal ages, osculation was again repeated.

Matthew advanced, and having kissed Clara, not to that young lady's entire satisfaction, said, "I can't have you in the shop ; go in the parlour."

Brothers and sister all went, and the door was

shut. How many questions were asked and answered none of the three could tell. Matthew and Jane Parkhouse both looked into the street. Matthew had to dust a pair of boots very vigorously and for a long time, apparently obtaining a fresh supply of polish from passing the duster across his eyes. Jane's spectacles had never required such a long time to adjust them, for the perfect achievement of which a handkerchief was necessary. At length, with a very suspicious moisture in the eyes, Matthew said, " You left no address."

Jane actually winked. She had never been known to be guilty of it before, or was ever again ; she must therefore be excused. Matthew laughed so long and joyously, that he seemed never to have known a care. He seemed to have lost the " kink " in his shoulders, a light appeared to shine all around him again, as he shook Jane by the hand. They both seemed treading on air, when they were brought to the level of ordinary life as Reuben, Miller Bates's carter, entered and said, " Be measter's boots ready ? "

Matthew shook himself together, called James,

and business recommenced. The prose of every day intruded on the romance. Jane and Clara departed. At dinner Matthew explained to James and Robert sundry matters; the most important was that in future a share of the profits would be theirs—a small one, to be sure. Think of it, Dives, as you cut your guinea pine, what a sum of half that amount was to the orphans, beggared by the vice of a dead father, and grumble less because you cannot enjoy it more.

All day the new stock of boots and shoes were sold in quantities before unknown. When shutting-up time was near, James asked, “ Could I and Robert have a sovereign ? ”

Memory struck a string that jarred in the reminiscences of the past, as Matthew said, “ What for ? I insist on knowing.”

“ To buy a pair of boots each, for Clara and Parky.”

Matthew had to polish another pair of boots in a dark corner.

The supper went merry as a marriage bell. The two parcels were done up. One boot of each pair had a card written in perfectly juvenile but

clear round hand—"From Bobby," and "From Jimmy." It was a revival of the names of childhood.

After supper Matthew looked at the brothers, who, rising, went with him across the town a little way, and all three looked with chastened sadness at the waters of the mill-dam. It was a fit ending to the day. Both took a hand of their best friend in silence; but a sober undercurrent of content filled the heart of the old man, and hope illumined the future of the younger ones. They saw a figure approaching; it was a man, who wished them good evening and went on. They all recognized Maurice Jones. The spring of joy seemed to dry in the breast of each, but they understood not how. It is fortunate for us we cannot exorcise speech from the dark phantom called to-morrow.





CHAPTER VII.

WHEN the mountebank shouted in the Athenian market-place the secret of memory, the sage said, "Teach me how to forget." Gabriel St. John sat in his study and wished he too could forget one or two of the pages of his history. He had several times turned the leaf and began afresh, but the blots on the back copies he had never tried to erase with the sharp knife of repentance; he only tried not to see them. Not but that the most carefully erased blot leaves a mark and scar visible to the head-master, when he turns over the leaves when the copy-book is done and the pupil passed to another sphere of action.

A letter lay on the table; it was wet with tears, both old and new. Far off in distant Spain lay a young man dying, and before he died he had

gathered together the last of his energies to write a long letter to his father. He repented of his wasted life, now ebbing away. He had burnt the candle at both ends with an industry and perseverance worthy a better cause. His follies and vices had been open and patent to the world, but they had never been stained with baseness except to himself, and he had imagined he did no wrong. But death was very near ; he already seemed to hear the twanging of the bow-string that told the shaft was speeding to lay him low. His past career was anything but cheering to look back upon. Memory brought back the scenes of wild revel, not with the artificial light of passion, making the tin-foil look like gold, but the cold, stern daylight of truth showed the bright colours and glittering pleasures to be daubs and shams. Isadore St. John told his father that no disgrace, in the world's view, hung over his life ; but he wrote chiefly about his brother, praying the old man to see that he, when advanced to the position of the heir of the name, might live a worthier life, more true to himself, his country, and his God.

Gabriel sighed and looked round. He wished

to turn the leaf over, as he had done before. He was not a man of great strength of feeling ; he had worn out the deeper emotions of the heart in frivolous pleasures. The thought crossed his mind that perhaps Isadore was in low spirits, and the feelings he expressed were only proper when a man was ill. He was sorry for Isadore, but more sorry for himself ; and as his thoughts took a more selfish turn, he wondered at the tears that had fallen on the letter.

A knock at the door was answered by "Come in," and Edward St. John, his second son, entered, who cast a look round the room of deep observation. The young man had an air of concentration that his father and brother had never possessed. A large well-formed head, though not a very high forehead, went with a face not easily to be forgotten : black eyes, with well-defined eyebrows, hooked nose, and firmly cut mouth, the lower jaw of which slightly protruded, but this was skilfully hidden by a black beard. He was about the middle height, of not too slender a make, which was the result of muscle, not fat. As his son hummed a tune in a *débonnaire* manner, Gabriel

gathered up the letter and locked it in the library table before him. Edward's eyes glanced round the shelves of volumes with the eye of a hawk, and, seeing none unlocked, concluded his father had been writing or reading letters on business, so it appeared to him a propitious time to open the game he intended to play. He therefore lightly said—

“ Could you trust me with the key of your deed chest to-day? I wish to look at the lease of Rooter's farm; he takes an easy tone about his rent.”

Gabriel said “ Yes ” with unusual alacrity. He was pleased to see Edward take such an interest in matters he usually seemed to care nothing for. The business of the outer world was intruding in a very welcome manner to drown his remorseful thoughts. He put off the evil day with a feeling of relief he could hardly account for.

“ Shall I help you, Ted ? ”

“ I shall not be at liberty to look until after dinner, sir.”

Gabriel's nap, of daily occurrence, would be a lion in the way at that time. So Edward, having got the key, strolled out. He went through the

plantation at the back of the house, and over two stiles and fields; about three hundred yards further brought him to the village, where, calling at the post-office, he took his letters. An occasional present to the post-master's wife insured his letters being left till he fetched them. He did not care to have them left at Stratton Manor, his father's house; not that he had any great secrets at present to conceal, but he found a satisfaction in being independent in the matter.

The little village of Stratton lay in one straight street, and the road then ran for about a mile through meadows and corn fields, past three or four farmhouses, till it joined the high-road that led to Littledale, five miles further on. The property of his father lay in and around the village, extending nearly to the high-road, with a few bits lying beyond. The St. Johns were county people, not exorbitantly wealthy, but no extraordinary vices had impoverished them. For generations they had been rather lavish in youth, rather close in old age; so the property remained much the same. An occasional marriage with an heiress had added a farm or two; an occasional mortgage

had induced extra care in the next generation to wipe it off. The stream of time had gone smoothly with the St. Johns since a Mr. St. John, in the reign of James the Second, had settled there. He had married a lady of the neighbourhood, and they had been accounted people of the place ever since. There is a strange clannishness in the bucolic mind, no doubt descending from the time when the tents were the home of the clan, and each in turn had to watch the common property in peace and fight for it in time of war, when a stranger was perhaps a spy or a thief, nevertheless to be offered food and drink, but to depart on the morrow. The word pagan (derived from *pagus*, a village) shows that even then dead forms and dethroned gods lingered in the rural districts, and still in villages and hamlets is heard the echo of dead and buried superstitions and beliefs.

Edward opened his letters and read them. Two were from acquaintances—one was an invitation to a ball in a month's time in the Littledale Town Hall; the other was from his tailor, not a dunning letter, but to ask the question of the solvency of an acquaintance.

He strolled on till he came to the end of the village, and got over the stile into the churchyard. He paused and looked at the graves. There was one in a dark corner: "John Penny," with age and date. "Strange," he thought, half aloud, "that what John said should affect me. He was a drunken fellow, but he was dying. I think he told the truth, or what he thought was truth, years ago. 'Master Edward,' said he, 'never you mind, but if Lord Chiveydale dies, you go and marry Clara Mauder. She will bring you riches and power.' Poor fellow! I got him out of a scrape, and told a lie over it. He was fond of me, but a very ignorant clod indeed. Was he ever more than he seemed? I think not; he was so ignorant and brutish in his ideas and aspirations. Clara's gone now, I don't know where. She was not bad looking, but I can't throw myself away on a peradventure. I got her to tell me the history of her life, but couldn't make anything of it. When I went to Salisbury three days ago, I saw in a paper the death of Lord Chiveydale, with no issue. But Clara's gone, and left no address. Her aunt's name was Parkhouse, so what could Penny know?"

Her aunt never married, so I don't see the connection. Was he delirious ? It is such a long time, I had half forgotten it ; I'll look this afternoon. It's no use asking Smith—he is the only lawyer worth having about here—till I come to some facts."

Edward retraced his steps and walked about the home farm till the dinner-bell rang. They dined at the Manor at the patriarchal hour of two o'clock. After dinner Edward strolled into the library, and having unlocked the great safe, looked over all the recent deeds, till he came to the more ancient ones. But the cramped writing foiled him ; the unknown English words and peculiar phraseology were beyond his comprehension. He was about to restore them, when two papers, yellow with age, nearly perished with decay, attracted his attention. He deciphered a little, and then put them in his pocket-book. Having replaced all the deeds and locked the doors of the chest, he went into the dining-room, where he found his father just awoke from his nap. He returned the key, and said he could not find what he wanted. This was strictly true in one sense.

In the evening he went into the village again :

the day must be filled up somehow. The farmers spoke to him with respect. Isadore had been away so long he was half forgotten. Sundry pieces of gossip were discussed : Solomon's bay mare was to be broke and sold ; the crop on the upland was bad ; the water meadow had a good math of hay this year ; Lawyer Smith was coming to-morrow to see John Steggall about three heifers he had sold him, but John had forgotten their ages, and had guaranteed they were younger than they proved to be. Edward's attention was aroused. When would Smith be in the village ? he asked. At three o'clock, and would attend at the Stratton Arms, which was the house they were sitting in. Edward was at the point of saying he would call, but, thinking better of it, resolved to drop in as if by accident.

Just then a horseman passed at full gallop—it was a moonlight night—in the direction of the Grange. The company wondered who it could be. Edward went home and saw a horse covered with foam standing on the gravel walk in front of the Manor, which was sacred from four-footed beasts in a general way. He was puzzled, but entering

the open door saw the servants talking in low tones. The stranger looked out from the library door and said—

“Send for Mr. Edward.”

Edward stepped in. His father had bowed himself down on the table behind which he was sitting. Edward approached and, in a voice full of real anxiety, inquired what was the matter. On the desk was a legal-looking document :—

“CONSULATE OF BAYONNE, SPAIN.

“*Certificate of Death of a British Subject.*

“Isadore St. John, aged twenty-seven, height five feet ten inches, dark eyes, and regular features, died this morning, at six o’clock, June 27th, 18—”

A letter from his *compagnon du voyage* stated that, a Queen’s messenger being about to start, he had sent the certificate, and the next vessel that sailed would carry the personal effects of Isadore to England.

After the first shock, Edward could hardly be expected to feel the poignant grief that his father did. He was now the eldest son; but the old man’s grief was rendered more deep and intense by

the thought that the last appeal of the dead had been disregarded, thrown aside, and locked out of sight.

Next day Gabriel sat in the library as before. In a half-hesitating way, he said to Edward, who sat opposite—

“I had a letter from Isadore; shall I read it, or would you like to read it yourself?”

“Thanks; I will read it myself,” replied his son, putting it carefully into his pocket.

Just then a servant having knocked, said, “Mr. Joshua Smith begs to leave his respects.”

Edward rose. “Shall you see him, father?”

“No,” said Gabriel. “Tell him I will see him next week.”

The door closed on Edward, who, finding Smith in the breakfast-room, received his condolences in a very appropriate manner. Still Edward lingered. Joshua began to think of going, when Edward suddenly said—

“Now I think of it, my father found an old letter, or rather document, in his deed chest. Could you kindly translate it into understandable English? It is a legal document, apparently.”

The lawyer smiled, but it was a crafty smile. Edward noticed this, and in consequence only handed him the half, which Joshua, drawing an inkstand and writing materials to him, copied in a regular and legal handwriting :—

“I, Esmond Edward, fourth Earl of Chivedale, in the county of Lancaster to wit, do, being of sane mind, testify that Isadore Percy St. John is indeed my third son, of my body lawfully begotten, and that he goes away on the service of his king with my full and entire concurrence ; and I therefore give him my blessing and a portion of one thousand pounds, for to have and to hold as he shall see fit.”

This was all the paper that Joshua could decipher, as it was broken off. He took his leave ; and Edward, having wished him good-day, sat as one in a dream. So many events had crowded in so short a space, he felt bewildered, but recovering himself went to the library, where he found his father a little better, and having returned the letter he had not read, said—

“Mr. Smith will call this day week.”

Late at night Edward, having locked his room door, again applied himself to the remainder of the paper. By aid of the first part to refer to, and Joshua Smith’s rendering to help him, he deciphered it at length with difficulty :—

“The wicked have stirred up one against the divine right of our blessed King James, who, holding the ark of the Lord in the tabernacle of the wilderness—the true Catholic faith, to wit—shall triumph as Gideon over his enemies. They shall lick the dust with fear and trembling before him; like a giant refreshed with wine shall he smite the ungodly.

(Signed) “ESMOND EDWARD.

“Whereof we witness the same—

“ESMOND EDWARD,

“CHARLES JAMES,

“JOSEPH HENRY,

“*Sons of the above, and brothers of
the said Isadore Percy.*”

Here it broke off. But no trace of date except

one, which Edward, on holding it up for a moment to the light, perceived : the water-mark in the paper was dated 1686.

“ Then my ancestor must have gone to fight Monmouth,” he thought. “ I wonder if he lost his money, or made more of it ? ”

He was still speculating on the subject, when another inclosure fell out. It was more modern.

“ To my dear son Edward Reginald St. John.

“ All the deeds, certificates, and registers of my ancestors I beseech him to be careful of. They are in a secret place, well known to me and one other only—my well-beloved steward, Jacob Penny, to wit—who will, on his attaining his majority, show him the same. I leave this writing that the fact of the battle of Zenta, in which Prince Eugene defeated the infidel Turks, may not be forgotten in the memory of my descendants. There Charles James St. John, having fled his country on the accession of King William the Third, was basely slain by a renegade Christian; whom he conquered in battle ; all account of which is lost, save what I acquired by accident and have deposited where no

sacrilegious hands can easily disturb the same. Let him carefully see that Littledale church is undisturbed, and the pulpit of the priest shall stand a memorial of trust. But never let him aspire for what he shall never attain ; rather in new scenes and aspirations carve out a name for himself. The story of the fall may be followed by a redemption to new and higher glories, but Eden shall never be restored to Adam's race.

“ JOSEPH REGINALD ST. JOHN.

“ Jan. 21, 1807.”

Edward sat still as his task was completed. But one great fact still obtruded itself : he had not found in the great safe anything of importance, except leases and comparatively modern certificates and registers. Neither could he make much of the last sentence, but dismissed it with the passing thought that his respected ancestor must have presented the peculiar compound of a Puritan upholder of the Stuarts. With the sanguine hopefulness of twenty-two, he went to bed and at length to sleep, and dreamt he took his seat in the Lords, who were all seated in the library

downstairs, which had obligingly stretched itself for the purpose to an indefinite length, as, at the far end, the Lord Chancellor very kindly pulled out the missing documents from the Woolsack.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE Rev. Cyrus Clark sat in his study. A month had elapsed since his interview with Matthew. He was more conversant with the affairs of Little-dale than ever. His congregation sent for him with edifying eagerness ; but it was the sins of their neighbours, and not their own, they bemoaned and confessed. He found they all had afflictions, but their neighbours had judgments fall on their sinful heads. It was vain to stop the current of talk when once set going ; so, utterly sick at heart, he was musing on many things. The evening was drawing in. He rang for lights ; and as the room lighted up, he thought of his unwritten sermon for Sunday. A heap of opened notes and two or three books lay on the table, not in confusion as he had left them, but all neatly arranged,

just convenient to his hand. It then struck him for the first time that Sally Grimes, and not Mrs. Parkhouse, had brought the candles. He rang the bell again ; Sally appeared.

“Mrs. Parkhouse in ?” he said.

“No, sir ; but she said she would be back in the evening.”

He would fain have asked further, but a slight difficulty of utterance half prevented him. At length he got out, “Miss Maunder in ?”

Sally tossed her head, and said spitefully, “No, she ain’t.” The appellation “Miss” applied to one she considered a fellow-servant roused her ire. The Rev. Cyrus, unable to fathom or not caring to seek further, was silent, and Sally whisked out.

Half an hour later Mrs. Parkhouse arrived. She went straight to her master’s room, and said—

“If you please, sir, Clara’s gone to stay with her brothers for to-night. Matthew would be glad to see you in the morning.”

Mrs. Parkhouse retired. But the sermon was not written ; the little heaps lay unconsidered. The Rev. Cyrus thought, and the more he thought the more it puzzled him. Should he never have

the puzzle explained? But it was explained next morning, in a way that disconcerted the vicar not a little. Matthew called at nine o'clock, and was admitted to an audience, when he plunged *in medias res* with a speed that showed he could scarcely summon courage to do it.

"If you please," he began, "I thought, if you had no objection, sir, Clara could come and live with me and her brothers."

The vicar looked up and said quietly, "Why?"

Matthew Elgood shifted from one foot to another; he looked up and looked down, but spoke not.

"Is it your desire, or some one else's?"

"Well," said Matthew, "I'll tell you, sir. Truth is always best. Neighbours do talk and say she dresses like a lady, and does no work, and that——" Here he stopped and got scarlet.

"And that what?" asked his somewhat relentless questioner.

"That you have her in your study ever so long of a day."

"Quite true. She puts my study tidy; she did yesterday, as you see it now. But I see what you

don't like to tell. The neighbours gossip. Now, you have done a most stupid thing to take her away like that, but having gone, she must stay. But she had better come and see Mrs. Parkhouse every —that is to say, at intervals."

The Rev. Cyrus stopped and looked very straight at Matthew, as if to say, "You can go." But Matthew stuck like a leech; he half held his hand out in a shame-faced way. The vicar took no notice. At length Matthew, in his agony, blurted out—

"I don't want to be despised because I was frightened into doing a silly thing. Don't look at me like that, sir; it makes my burden heavier than I can bear. I tried to do right."

He stopped, as his pride stopped his utterance; but it was bitter to lose his good friend, his only adviser. He turned, with half a thought that he was deceived in the man before him, when the vicar's hand was put on Matthew's shoulder with an assurance of entirely renewed confidence. But he said nothing except, "All right, Matthew."

Elgood departed; but as the vicar sat down to write, he looked at the heap of neatly arranged

books, and did not touch them. A faint blush mantled his cheek, as he thought with a sigh, "I had better go away ;" then the thought it would be cowardly made him resolve not. Then he thought he would again, when a knock came at the door, and the morning post was delivered. He found he would be saved the trouble of deciding, as a letter was put in his hand. It ran thus :—

"The Cedars, Chiveydale.

"DEAR CYRUS,

"Come at once to yours truly ; we are in urgent want of you. Don't trouble about rector and canon ; let the one direct and the other fire in vain. Baby is not going to be christened till you come and do it ; his mamma wants it done at once. I found, on inquiring in London, you had betaken yourself to an obscure little collection of huts called Littledale. Are you studying Stonehenge, or what ?

"I forgot to say Mary wants some specimens of your local manufactures for my cabinet—such a beauty ; I will show it you when you come. To-day is Tuesday ; on Thursday I shall insist on your arrival. If you don't come, I shall believe

Ulysses is detained by some country siren. Make any arrangements you like, but *come*; when you will get away is another thing.

“Yours truly,

“HENRY ST. JOHN THOMPSON.”

Cyrus paused. “I must go,” he thought, “to the invitation of my earliest friend; but why does he write in a strain so unlike his usually somewhat doleful and laconic epistles?”

A discreet knock at the door, and a subdued voice asked, “What time would you please to want dinner, sir?”

“Come in; come in, Mrs. Parkhouse,” said Cyrus. It was the very opportunity he sought of sifting Clara’s departure, though he pretty well guessed what it would be. If a pimple is ever so small, it is troublesome; but who can keep from picking it? Few people can.

“Mrs. Parkhouse, pray be seated. I wanted to talk to you about a matter to me of importance, and very much so to others.”

“Certainly, sir;” but it came with a certain trepidation and confusion.

“ Will you, then, please tell me a little of the gossip of the singularly primitive phase of human nature found in Littledale ? ”

Jane only smoothed her apron and looked at the door as if hoping a parishioner would call. She could not escape the piercing look of his eyes, but sat silent. Cyrus was almost at his wits' end, when a new light suddenly dawned on him. He saw that Jane's name was mixed up in the matter, so, altering his tactics, smilingly said—

“ Matthew told me once you were a faithful friend to him and others. I doubt if I have forfeited the claim to that valued name. I have a great wish to do what I can for you in that capacity.”

“ Indeed, sir, you have been too kind. I wished to do you a service, but I failed to be of use, and have only made matters worse instead of better.”

“ Still we tread in a circle,” thought Cyrus. “ Matthew told me once, when I first came here, a few particulars of a certain John Penny. Did you ever know or hear what became of him ? ”

Jane's eyes became vague in their expression ; it was evident the past stirred within her. A faint

blush rose on her cheek ; her thoughts were in the past. "I don't know what he told, but I am sure Matthew never said anything bad of any one if he could help it."

"Do you know where John is now ?"

"I do. He is buried in Stratton churchyard ; but I lost sight of him for years before, and only when I went to live at Stratton, walking in the churchyard, knew that he was dead by seeing his tombstone."

"So it was at Stratton that you found a home after Mr. Maunder's death ?"

"I found a place at Stratton Manor, but no home. Sometimes, walking in the long picture gallery, I used to be frightened of even the paintings. I half fancied that Mr. Isadore Percy and his wife looked at me with real eyes instead of painted ones. He was the first of the family in these parts. I have left it, I hope, for ever."

"Why so, may I ask ?"

"Because a great fear fell on me that Clara might have a worse fate than even her mother. She wrecked the life of a good man, but I feared that Clara's would be wrecked by a bad one. But

I don't wish to judge my old mistress. Eunice Penny had not the giving of her hand; it went without her heart."

"But did she encourage Matthew, and then throw him over?"

"No, sir; she was afraid of her brother, and he was afraid of the squire."

"How so? He was not given to be afraid of any one, I should think?"

"Well, I'll tell you, sir. Matthew and Miss Penny used to meet seldom to speak, but whenever he passed she was somehow at the window. I only went to her just before her marriage. She did not see him so many times, to be sure, but it was an understood thing between them. She gave him her promise, but she was made to break it."

"Matthew did not tell me that."

"Perhaps he didn't; but it's true. You see, John's father was steward to Mr. St. John, of Stratton, all his life. The old Mr. St. John loved him like a brother. He caught cold, died, and Jacob was left with Mr. Gabriel. He was a young man who liked his pleasure and took it. He was very wild, so they didn't agree, for Jacob was a very

steady and regular young man. One day Mr. Gabriel wanted Jacob Penny to take a woman to lodge at his house that Mr. Gabriel was too intimate with. Mr. Jacob said he wouldn't, for the sake of his children. Mr. Gabriel was like Squire Mauder, a very determined man, so he said, 'Very well, I'll get it done somehow else ;' but he took Jacob's son by the hand, and made a gentleman of him, as he called it. He taught him all his bad ways ; they used to be the terror of all the fathers and mothers round for their daughters' sakes. People thought Mr. Gabriel was a gentleman, and could do as he liked ; but with John it was different. Jacob had to pay money for him, time after time, till no one respectable would look at John. He went from bad to worse, till he forged his father's name ; and that coming suddenly to the old man's knowledge, he died one day in his chair. He had sent Miss Eunice to Salisbury to school, and when his affairs were looked into there was nothing for either John or Miss Eunice. Mr. Gabriel married and settled down, but John came to Littledale. One day he called at the Salisbury school to see his sister, and gave

her a lot of papers. She was burning at the time a lot of old letters ; it was in the winter-time, and there was a fire. He said to her, ‘ Gabriel has sent me adrift, without a penny as he thought ; but I’ve done him, and he shall pay for it yet. I have got what he don’t care to lose.’

“ Three days after, a London lawyer and John came to Miss Eunice again, and wanted the papers back. ‘ You should have told me not to burn them,’ she said. He and his fine friend were furious ; they were of value, it appeared.

“ Eunice hired a fly and went to Stratton Manor to see Mr. Gabriel, but his wife insulted her. She was not a very clear-sighted woman, and told her she was come to try and get money out of her husband. Poor soul ! she had cause to be jealous. Mr. Gabriel bounced in and told her that she must tell him where her brother was. He thought she came to be paid for giving the papers up. The servants heard something, and went to the fly-man and told him he would be wanted for his share of the robbery. The fly-man, knowing no better, drove off. Miss Eunice had fainted, and when they had brought her

round, the fly-man was gone. He was followed, but said she left no parcel in the fly, and the affair was hushed up somehow.

"After Eunice was married she found out that Squire Maunder knew more than he cared to tell about the papers; he had them right enough, and, through threatening to tell Mr. Gabriel, had John under his thumb. He told his wife they did not belong to Mr. Gabriel at all, and that they would be a fortune for the children some day. But I don't understand these things. So when Lawyer Smith had all his deeds, he never got them, for Mrs. Maunder hid them and gave them to me for Matthew to keep. I never told Matthew all the particulars when I gave them to him, but he has kept them till now, maybe. I never asked him till about two months ago, when I wrote to ask him to come to see me as I was in trouble about Clara and Mr. Edward; and he said that when James was twenty-one they should be examined. But he didn't seem to mind them much; he was thinking about Clara more than a bundle of papers he never could make top or tail of."

"Then tell him," said the Rev. Cyrus, "to keep them. I am going on a journey, and in a fortnight I shall be back, and will look at them with him ; they shall be given to the rightful possessor, if I live long enough."

As usual with people, they had strayed away from the point in question, till the vicar asked the question, "And since you have been here, what has happened ?"

"Well, sir, Harold Smith, Lawyer Smith's son, was at the Feathers the other night. They was all talking of one thing and another, when old Bates the miller and Spears the baker was a-talking. They both had had more than usual, so their tongues were loose. Sally Grimes's aunt told old Bates how Sally had seen Clara go in your room to dust it of a morning, and that you came in and stopped ever so long, and that you came oftener when she was in there, and that Clara got more and more haughty to her."

Cyrus's conscience gave him a pretty hard twinge.

"And then, when you were gone one day, she looked in through the keyhole, and saw Clara

sitting at your chair and sort of placing herself at it as if receiving company, talking to herself, but she couldn't hear what. Then in the afternoon, as Clara came into the room and she was in the passage, you said, 'Don't forget to be here early to-morrow,' and Clara blushed. So she looked through the keyhole the next day, and saw Clara sitting down and you on your knees before her.

Cyrus got red. "Quite true," he said. "I told Miss Maun—I mean Clara—I had a book to show her. It was a very valuable one, with pictures, I had lent me. I said, 'Sit to the table, as some of the loose leaves may fall out.' About the middle of the book a picture fell out; it was broken, and I got down on my knees to look for the pieces. What then?"

But conscience told him the operation of looking for the pieces had been a long one, for he had looked up and seen Clara smile a pleased smile to see him at her feet.

"Harold goes over to Matthew and tells him all that they had said; and what with Harold being not very clear, and Clara, when Matthew taxed her

with it, blushing up and half denying and half saying 'twas true, it made Matthew mad, so he took her off to his house and said she should stop there. As they were going down by the Feathers, Mrs. Tyack was at the door, and I suppose, seeing Matthew looked angry and that Clara had been crying, said, 'Bad blood will show itself.' Then Matthew saw he had done a foolish thing in putting a handle to further gossip, but 'twas too late."

"Thank you, Mrs. Parkhouse," said Cyrus. "I must get you to stay, please, till this talk has blown over, or I have put the matter straight."

He felt angry that his housekeeper did not more decidedly take his side than was evident from her manner, but he felt that the best thing for all parties was his approaching absence.

In the afternoon a post-chaise whirled away the vicar on his journey to the Cedars. As he passed Matthew's house he saw a female figure at the window. His heart beat quick; it was Clara. She went back into the room a pace and waved an adieu, but instantly put her handkerchief to her eyes.

That action sealed his fate. Newton saw an apple fall, and his range of mortal vision was indefinitely lengthened, but the facts were as they had ever been. So the vicar flattered himself he saw a great deal further; perhaps he did in knowledge of life, but the facts of the case remained the same, as he one day found out. The view from the mountain top is not visible because the traveller is gazing at it: he is gazing at it because it is there.





CHAPTER IX.

As the Rev. Cyrus was borne along in the chaise, he found, unlike Dr. Johnson's experience, the movement was not exhilarating. Reaching Salisbury, he soon mapped out his route, and found that he must start by a night train, if he would not lose many hours and the more direct line of rail.

There is nothing so calls out a man's reflective powers as a solitary night journey by rail. He traced through the maze of the years of his life, guided by the clue of memory. In his childhood again he saw himself at school, a little boy in round jackets, tyrannized over by the bigger ones, his delicate appearance and name both expressed by the nickname of "Sally." He remembered his earnest gaze round for a friend among his companions, who all seemed intent on their own gratification. One

day he had been left in the schoolroom at peace, as cricket, a game he never excelled in, was going forward in an adjacent field. He was perforce driven to read, but it was not done with eagerness or pleasure. Looking vaguely round to see if a diversion offered itself, he saw on the ground beneath the seats of the awful big boys a letter. It was unsealed. He was tempted to read it, but a rush of better thoughts prevented him. He looked to see who the owner was, and saw it was Henry Thompson, a boy of some parts, but who achieved little, as languages were not to his taste, and Briarwood House had always prided itself on the classical attainments of both masters and scholars.

Evening closed in ; the merry shouting crowd returned : he felt no more alone. The idea that he was about to return the letter unread, after the hard battle with himself not to pry, was an unalloyed satisfaction. Thompson took the letter without a word of thanks, and Cyrus's somewhat confused look certainly looked as if he had read the contents. For a week Thompson intimated neither by word nor look that anything had passed between him and Cyrus. At the expiration of that time Thomp-

son suddenly confronted the smaller boy, and bade him follow him. There grew four or five trees in the corner of the play-field sacred to the altar of friendship; thither boys were wont to repair for mutual confidences. One boy, who delighted in Captain Mayne Reid's stories, said it was "a grove sacred in old time to the Druids, and that any fellow who split what he heard there would be sacrificed in a wickerwork basket on a roaring fire, amid crackers and squibs." Swellington, the head boy, who delighted the heart of the head master by his Latin verses, called it "The Briarwood Academe," and said it reminded him of the Athenian gardens of that name.

As they approached the shade of the trees, Thompson asked, "Did you read that letter?"

"No," answered Cyrus.

"I thought not," said his interrogator with a sage nod of wisdom, gathered in a lengthened experience of the world of just fourteen years and ten days. "I shall in future look to your welfare." The manner with which Alexander pardoned and took into favour a conquered king's family was nothing to it.

Thompson did what he said; and on that day a friendship was begun that lasted through all their school-days, appeared when the young men were at college, and finally, when Thompson took to himself a wife, Cyrus was confidant in the court-ing days and “best man” at the wedding. But Thompson’s father sent him, though a man of property, to a town in the Midland counties and bought him a small lawyer’s practice. Henry, who was a man of ambitious tastes, took to the change in a very cheerful manner, and said to his friend, “I am going to a quiet place, but I shall manage the affairs of a distant cousin, who is a large land-owner near.”

Cyrus had been a curate two years, when Sir Lawrence Bunkum offered him the vicarage of Littledale. It was not worth much—a bare three hundred a year—but Cyrus had lived a quiet, un-eventful life; he gladly took it. At the time he removed, Henry Thompson was abroad on some mysterious business. At such times his practice was managed by a confidential clerk; so the first intimation of his return was his friend’s letter, written in so very joyous and cheerful a tone that

he felt sure some great piece of good fortune had befallen him.

All this passed through the brain of the solitary traveller. He had changed lines from time to time and at ten o'clock on Thursday evening found himself at the gates of his friend's house. It had always been called Norrey Lodge; he wondered what had caused him to rechristen it the Cedars.

But Norrey Lodge was shut up, and, what was still more strange, he found a board stating it was to be let or sold, apply to Jabez Starks. It crossed his mind with a sort of wonder that that was the name of Henry's confidential clerk. The fly-man, waiting with his luggage, appeared to be a way of solving the difficulty, so he asked the man if he knew the Cedars.

"Do I know it? Rather. Why didn't you say you wanted the Cedars at once? We've come three miles out of our way."

Cyrus jumped in, and was driven rapidly to the station again; but turning into another road from thence, a mile or two further on, the driver pulled up at a lodge gate, which opened on a park of

bewildering extent and surpassing beauty. Large and splendid trees of the most approved varieties mingled with oak-trees, the patriarchs of the grove. Each swelling undulation was clothed with living beauty; deer grazed in tranquil peace or champed the lower boughs, while rabbits ran across the path to the shelter of the adjacent bank. An undulation larger than ordinary apparently barred the way, but a narrow cutting, almost concealed by two gigantic evergreen oaks, opened a scene not easily to be forgotten. A lake stocked with rare and beautiful wild fowl, with an island in the centre, upon which were some ecclesiastical ruins shaded by trees, added another beauty to the scene. Behind the lake stood a noble pile of buildings that seemed even in the daylight so strongly massive, and yet so beautiful, that the spectator half looked for some dragon or fabulous beast to assure him it was the scene of some fairy tale. It oppressed the senses with an indefinite sensation of grandeur. As a writer once remarked, "Here we are so much the slaves of the eye that anything unusual strikes with wonder. Look over three miles of level country; you turn away in

weariness ; but let that same space stand at an angle of ninety degrees, and you have the Andes split from base to highest peak. Poets would write, painters would reproduce its beauties ; but the three miles of flat country are more beautiful really. The waving corn, the green level grass, each homestead nestling in its own little plot of ground, are quite as beautiful as the barren precipice that yields naught. So, when we look on a large building, we are oppressed with awe, while miles of streets affect us not, except with languor ; but each house in those long lines of street contains a story quite as interesting in the eye of Omnipotence as the doings of the owners of each lofty pile. There is a good deal, if we want admiration, in how one puts the bricks. The man who builds a street benefits his fellows and is forgotten ; they pay him rent grudgingly ; but he who rears a pile of building for his own residence is admired, even by the people he takes rent of for ploughing the land round it."

The vehicle turned off somewhat from the mansion to a by-road, which terminated in a house of exceedingly comfortable appearance. The

front door stood not quite in the centre—one window on one side and two windows on the other, surmounted by four windows on the first story, over which the roof. Five noble cedar trees stood in the front, not too near the house, but evidently belonging to it; and as the spectator glanced at their graceful forms and pleasant foliage, it was self-evident why the house was called “The Cedars.”

Henry was on the steps. “How slow the fly must have driven!” said he.

“Not at all,” said Cyrus. “I went to Norrey Lodge. I thought you had not removed. Found it empty; had to inquire of cabby where “The Cedars” was, got in again, and here I am.”

A lady came out to welcome the guest, and when he looked at her he could hardly realize the fact that twelve months before he had seen her “a blushing bride.” Her voice was more full, her features more set; her beauty seemed more perfect. He had left a shy girl, and found in its place a woman of determination, talent, and resource. The change was analogous to that from an armed mob to the disciplined phalanx, or the raw recruit to the trained and self-possessed soldier.

As baby was produced the expression altered ; the eyes become soft and even dreamy in expression.

After ablutions and a bath that recompensed the vicar for his want of sleep, he descended to lunch, at which his host and hostess awaited him with smiling faces of hearty welcome. Lunch despatched, they adjourned to the grounds. A lawn ran beyond the house, fronting it, and a small fruit garden on the south side. At the far end of the lawn two patriarchal elms kept watch and ward over the greensward. Beneath the elms some garden seats, pleasantly in the shade, were put into requisition, and Henry said to his guest—

“ Prepare for a surprise. I suppose you know my name ? ”

“ I should think so,” said Cyrus.

“ Well, you don’t, then. It appears it is Henry St. John Thompson.”

“ I congratulate you,” said Cyrus.

“ And, what is more, I shall soon make an addition to it.”

Cyrus looked for further explanation.

“ The fact is,” said Henry, “ I shall, I hope, soon be Lord Chiveydale.”

"Don't say hope, Henry ; say you will take your right position with the world," said his wife, as she looked at him.

"Well, I should never if it had not been for you," he rejoined, fondly and proudly.

Mary looked at him with a gratified and pleased smile.

"You see, Cyrus, Mary found out—in fact, I told her of the existence of deeds and documents that went far to establish it, so by her advice I went to his lordship, who is just dead. His lawyer looked into the matter, and pronounced my claim indisputable. I told him that I did not wish to put it forward for the first time after his death, as that would look like a got-up thing. He expressed his delight, as he was pleased to say, that, as manager of his matters, I had shown I don't know what good qualities, and the fact of an undisputed succession was grateful to him. The next day I was sent for again. He asked what expense I had been at, and gave me a cheque that more than covered it, so I had not to rob Mary as I had done."

Mary put her hand over his lips. Getting free, he continued—

"Mary went to the Lord Chancellor's. There was some money left for her exclusive use, but she got it transferred to me for the necessary inquiries ; and now, in two months, when the judges are sitting, I intend to move."

Mary interposed, "I do not feel so confident as you, dear, of the undisputed taking possession, but I do feel confident of your ultimate success."

"What opposition can I dread ? Mr. Pod, the family lawyer, says it is quite clear, and is with me to the uttermost ; in fact, he offered to find the sinews of war, and my father devoted his life to the task of unearthing the genealogies of the St. Johns. There are four branches. The first is extinct ; the second, Charles James, died in Hungary ; the third, Isadore Percy, died without issue in the west."

Cyrus uttered a little cry ; both host and hostess looked up inquiringly.

"Nothing," he said, quickly. "I will take a turn in the grounds."

Henry laughed ; Mary looked grave.

"Cyrus knows something," she said, "and if he goes without telling us, I will never forgive him."

"Little Goody Two-shoes, you always see something so dreadful."

"No, I do not see anything dreadful. I see a great piece of good fortune. Forewarned is fore-armed."

"But what can he tell or know?"

Baby cried, and Mary went into the house.

Henry Thompson still remained seated, and looked at Cyrus, as he still walked up and down the lawn with a troubled spirit. Gradually his wife's suggestions filled his mind with misgivings. What if, after all, the rich inheritance should slip away from him? He looked over hill and dale spread before him with feelings of dread he could not put in words.

Cyrus communed thus with himself: "What have I to tell? Would it injure any one at Littledale? It may be a coincidence, after all, and nothing more." He raised his face to the blue sky and sought for a clue to guide him. Suddenly he thought, "It could not harm Clara." As he half uttered her name, a bright spot appeared in each cheek. "Why should I be afraid to tell the truth? I will." It did not occur to him that the

thought that Clara would not be injured determined him to tell what he knew, which really did not amount to much, so he argued to himself, turning to Henry, who, wondering at the cleared brow, said to himself—

“ Colic, after all ! ”

“ What time do you dine ? ”

“ Six o’clock, if it suits you.”

“ Where does Mr. Pod live ? ”

“ About a mile off. Are you going to him for advice ? ”

“ No ; but I think you will to-morrow.”

“ Shall I, indeed ? ” asked Henry, with a rather uneasy laugh. “ Suppose we ask him to dinner, and you tell us when together ; or I will give you a room to yourselves if you wish it.”

“ No, no, Henry. After dinner I will tell you you and Mary what it was disturbed me, and then you can form your own opinions.”

“ I would rather Pod were here.”

“ Very well ; then let us ask him, and take a turn till dinner time.”

A messenger was despatched to Mr. Pod’s offices. He promised to come ; as he was a bachelor, he did not mind a short notice.

Six o'clock drew near. Henry and Cyrus walked over the small pleasure farm together, inspected cattle and poultry, swedes and barley, till half-past five, when both retired to dress for dinner.

Reassembling in the dining-room, Mr. Pod was introduced—a little spare grey man of about forty-five. He had never married, and was always welcome wherever he went. On being introduced to the Rev. Cyrus Clark, Pod thought, “A very unstable mind, always uncertain what he intends, but truthful.” Silas Pod always made up his mind, when he saw a man first, whether he liked him or not, even though he was a lawyer; but he seldom expressed his likes or dislikes. Covers were removed and dinner began.





CHAPTER X.

THE dining-room at the Cedars was situated to the right hand of the front door ; beyond it lay a well-stocked library. It was rather an inconvenient arrangement, as there was no way to the library except through the dining-room, but for purposes of private conversation unequalled, because if one of the party sat with his eyes on the dining-room door, having put open the library door, no one could approach within earshot.

The dinner was finished, the dishes cleared, but the cloth left. The decanters and dessert were carried into the library by the servants, as Henry and his wife were all impatient to hear what Cyrus had to communicate. The group round the library table was worthy of a painter. At the top of the table sat Mary. Her eyes shone with a clear light,

reflecting the strong mind within, as the lake reproduces in its bosom the surrounding landscape. She was her husband's chief hope, even more than Pod, even more than he acknowledged to himself. There was nothing of the usual conception of a strong-minded woman; her table was furnished with elegance and economy. The trunk of the elephant can pick up a pin or tear a branch off the strongest tree of the forest with equal facility. Her husband sat at the bottom, with his back to the window, the light from which shone over his head as the declining orb of day sank in bright glory over the distant hill. Silas Pod had quietly provided himself with writing materials, which, mingling with the dessert, gave a rather incongruous appearance to the table. Cyrus sat opposite; his brow was clearer than it was, but a lurking doubt seemed not quite to have vanished.

"Well," said Henry, "now begin, Cyrus, and tell us what you wish; if there is anything you would rather not, skip it."

Pod's brow contracted with a warning wrinkle, but, recollecting that a story once begun insensibly unravels itself, he was silent. Cyrus swallowed a lump in his throat, cleared up, and began—

“Sir Lawrence Bunkum offered me the living of Littledale, as you, Henry, are aware. I went there and found a very quiet community. I was scarcely inducted, when my attention was attracted by the shoemaker of the place, Matthew Elgood by name, a man of ten thousand—one of those bright characters that redeem human nature from the accusations so freely levelled by those who, only looking at the surface, take a distorted and cynical view. I went one day to ask his advice regarding the allotments I had recently started, when the conversation branched off. He asked me to take into my household a housekeeper and assistant. He told me their sad story, which was that of so many thousands—a family utterly ruined by the vice of the head of it.”

“What were their names?” said Pod.

“Mrs. Parkhouse was the name of the housekeeper; Miss Mauder was the name of her assistant. In due course they arrived. When I saw Mrs. Parkhouse, or more properly Miss, as she had never been married, I found her a very superior person; but Clara was a bright, beautiful girl of eighteen, whose presence seemed to

lighten up the old vicarage with a gleam of sunshine that seemed to turn all she touched to gold, like the bright rays of the sun falling on the trees of the forest, turning them to a living gold, and adding a new beauty to the waving boughs."

Mary looked at Henry with a meaning glance of interest and amazement. Henry seemed quite absorbed, but when Cyrus made a half turn to Mary, he elevated his eyebrows and slightly nodded. The face of Silas showed no emotion, but his lips twitched once or twice.

"In a very short time Clara left under very disagreeable circumstances; and on my interrogating Mrs. Parkhouse about the matter, she showed great confusion. I tried to get her to speak, but could not, so I led the conversation to her past life, feeling sure I must obtain the information I sought in an indirect manner. I was not disappointed, and heard as well the story of her life. There lives at about five or six miles from Littledale a Mr. Gabriel St. John, whose father had a steward named Jacob Penny. His son quarrelled with the steward; but John Penny, Jacob's son, was led into all sorts of vice and extravagance by

Gabriel, who is now the squire of Stratton. She also happened to mention the name of the first Mr. St. John. It was Isadore Percy."

Silas Pod's chair became very uncomfortable ; he wriggled on the seat uneasily.

" Gabriel married and cast John adrift ; but John contrived to lay his hand on some papers, which he intrusted to the care of his sister, Eunice Penny, a governess in Salisbury. John's extravagance had reduced her to become teacher in the school where she was once a pupil. She was, I have heard, very beautiful. John returned with a London lawyer to get possession of them again ; she told him they were burnt."

" That London lawyer was my father," said Henry.

Cyrus started. " I know they were not burnt," said Cyrus, resuming his narrative. " Eunice took them to Stratton Manor, but was insulted by Mrs. St. John, who, knowing her husband's life had been anything but correct, imagined the worst when a beautiful stranger asked to see him in private. Eunice fainted, and by the time she recovered, the servants had gathered enough to

hear there was a robbery. One of them going out taxed the fly-man with the same, who drove off. When Eunice had recovered and explained her mission, the fly was nowhere to be found. When traced to Salisbury, the man denied all knowledge of the papers that had been left in the fly. Eunice in course of time married Squire Maunder, of Littledale, who drank the most of his property, and gambled away the rest. By some strange coincidence the papers came into his hands. His wife obtained possession of them and gave them to Mrs. Parkhouse, who, by her request, gave them to Matthew. The two sons of Maunder were apprenticed to Matthew Elgood, and work with him now. The daughter Clara, since she left the vicarage, is with her brothers. I saw her at the window as I left Littledale yesterday morning.” Cyrus blushed as he acknowledged the fact.

Mary rose; her husband opened the door, and she went out. The three gentlemen drew nearer the table.

“I thought, from the name being the same Mrs. Parkhouse mentioned to me, there might be some connection,” said Cyrus.

"It was a guess, but a correct one," said Henry. "My father was the London lawyer, but he always thought the papers were burnt. But I can fill up a space you could not in the narrative. When the fly-man drove off, he took a turn in the road not towards Salisbury. When his horse was tired, he put it up at a public-house, where, on entering the only room for customers—it was a poor wayside inn—he found a gentleman, at least a person well-dressed, who invited him to drink. Drink loosed his tongue: he told his wrongs. Mauder—for it must have been he—ordered more drink, and finally left the man asleep with his head on the table. He then went and took the papers out of the fly, paid the reckoning, and departed on his horse.

"Many years after this, my father was one day surprised by a call from two persons—one a person very over-dressed, the social status of whom there could be no doubt of; the other a man with a bloated, dissipated face, who asked him if he had not been inquiring at a certain celebrated firm of solicitors. My father was surprised; asked what business it was of theirs. The man put his finger

to his nose, and said, ‘I’ll do more for you than they can; can’t we, Sarah?’ Sarah, as she was called, nodded. ‘I must have money down,’ added the stranger. My father thought they were a pair of swindlers. The man smelt of brandy, and the woman I leave to your imagination.”

(Cyrus did think that if Clara was like her mother, what must that man’s taste be like who could neglect her for such a creature !)

“‘What have you got to say?’ said he shortly.

“‘Ain’t you bin inquiring for Hisidoor St. John, and can’t we sell papers to tell’ee? Say ’ow much,’ said the person addressed as Sarah.

“‘If you have any information I am willing to pay,’ answered my father, ‘but the papers must be left at my solicitors.’

“The man whistled and the woman winked. ‘They bain’t no use to you, for Bill Simonds, my brother, says that——’ The man touched her arm; she got red and stammered.

“‘Tell you what,’ said the man, ‘the papers in question will put you in possession of what you want, if they were burnt, not unless. You thought they was burnt once.’

"The man looked at a picture in the room with apparent interest. My father gave him another look, when he perceived that a nameless something told he had been different once ; he looked at the picture with an eye of a person understanding such things. The woman got up. There was a pencil and paper and writing materials on the table ; she scribbled a line and tossed to my father, who took it up. It ran, '£50 to ME and them's yourn.' The 'me' was doubly underlined.

"The man turned and said, 'Any bid ?' The woman put her finger on her lips.

"My father felt sure they were a couple of impostors, so he shortly added, 'Yes. If you don't both go at once I shall send for the police.'

"The woman left on the table an address, also in pencil, of a would-be fashionable street.

"My father called on the solicitors next day, ascertained that they had a youth in their employ called William Simonds, who (the firm having heard what my father said) was promptly kicked out. Father was returning home, when in front of his own door he saw, evidently on the watch, the man who had called on him.

“ ‘ Tell you what ; say £500 and you shall have them, and Sally into the bargain.’

“ My father stared ; such treachery he could hardly conceive.

“ ‘ When shall I call ? ’

“ My father turned away with such a gesture of loathing that the man seemed abashed.

“ My father’s inquiries at the address left by the woman brought nothing to light, except Sarah with a black eye and half-empty gin-bottle. She was very voluble, but incoherent ; offered any sum of money to any one who would tell who split on Bill Simonds, who if he warn’t her brother what’s the odds to any one ? But she would pay Jimmy out before she’d done with him ; he was gone and left her a wrong address, no use to no one. But her drunken mood changed and she became maudlin, and, putting the scrap of paper in my father’s hand, said, ‘ Take it if you want it.’ Then she got uproarious. My father went home and thought no more of the matter.

“ Some time afterwards, he was looking out some old clothes to give away, and in the pocket of an old waistcoat he found a hole. Tracing with his fingers

the edge of the binding, something crackled. He drew it out. It was the scrap the drunken woman had given him ; he had unconsciously taken it and put it in his waistcoat pocket. He recognized it by a blot which had been wiped off with the fingers in the form of a V, instead of blotting-paper being used in the usual way. The direction was—

“ — *Maunder,*

“ *The Grange,*

“ *Littledale.*

“ He sent a clerk down to make inquiries, who found the Grange was to let ; that it had been owned by a Mr. Maunder, who was dead ; in fact, he had been drowned a week or two before. The whole of the goods had been seized and sold by auction.

“ How my father came to know of the fly transaction I know not, except that he related it one day, and on my asking him he said, ‘ The person who told me did so under the pledge I would conceal his name. I shall do so still, although he is dead.’ ”

“ The thing for us to do,” said Silas, as soon

as Henry had finished, “is to get hold of Matthew, and induce him to show us the papers.”

“You will not do that very easily,” replied Cyrus; “he is going to keep them till James Maunder is twenty-one.”

“We don’t want to steal them,” said Henry angrily.

“No,” said Cyrus; “but Matthew, with all his goodness, is ignorant on some points, and he hopes that in some mysterious way the papers will give back to the children the inheritance that their father wasted. Wherever there is ignorance there is superstition, and Matthew, in company with a larger portion of the population than you could conceive possible, thinks opening anything when a person is exactly twenty-one is sure to put all things right for them.”

“I don’t understand exactly,” said Pod. “But is Matthew in business still?”

“Yes, he is; he has just enlarged his premises,” said Cyrus.

“Then I shall go to Littledale and try to get the papers, or a sight of them, within twenty-four hours. I am very doubtful of their value, but still it would be as well.”

"But can you leave your business?" asked Henry.

"I shall start on Friday—that is to-morrow night. I shall make arrangements with your old clerk Starks; he will take anything that comes to hand till I come back."

Cyrus broke in by saying, "Had I not better come with you?" To which Silas replied—

"You can, if you can get Mrs. Thompson to put off the christening. Go and ask her; I should much like your company."

The door closed on the vicar.

Silas then said to Henry, "Do you think he has proposed to the girl?"

"No," answered Henry, "because he came away. If he had he would have stuck there."

"Then," said Pod, "I am going to do him a service; but I doubt his being properly thankful. I mean to try and make him give her up. There were several points in his story hung fire. Firstly, what was the end of the dissipated John Penny? Secondly, what is the connection between Matthew Elgood and the Maunders? Thirdly, why did Clara return to Littledale? though that's not much

to us, except it was through that and Cyrus's imprudence we heard the story."

"What imprudence do you mean, Silas?"

"He! he! he!" laughed the lawyer. "Don't you see that was the unpleasant story that got about — 'Clara left in a very unpleasant manner'? I took it down, it was so amusing, There is no harm in Mr. Clark at all, but he is rather easily led."

"I shall speak to him as a friend."

"And do him the worst turn you ever did in your life. Don't suggest things; half the evil in life arises from suggestions."

Steps were heard in the dining-room.

"Well," said his host, "what luck?"

"Mary and baby both gone to bed."

But the next morning brought the required permission.

The evening train carried the Rev. Cyrus Clark and his companion towards Littledale. The night was dark; sparks from the engine flew past. The night closed blacker and blacker; neither felt inclined for conversation. Silas dropped asleep. Cyrus looked from the window into the night; he felt as if he was going he knew not whither.

The lights of towns appeared and were passed in the darkness. His eyes got confused; he fancied he was he knew not where. Faces looked at him and passed on the line—those he had known and half forgotten, then those he knew in later years. By-and-by the face of Clara looked on him. She seemed to come nearer; he tried to clasp the loved form, when it changed to a mermaid, half woman, half fish. He felt the slimy tail with a shudder, and he awoke to outward things. Had he been asleep or not? Silas was fast asleep opposite. He began to wonder what would be the next thing that would happen to him. He looked at the cushions and boards of the opposite side of the carriage, and he saw his own heart in the semi-darkness more clearly than he had yet done. He felt what it was that was taking him back once more so quickly. It was the hope of seeing again a beloved form. Yes! He determined to strike at once, but if he were too precipitate he might ruin his own cause. He might be accepted for his wealth and position.

Still the train sped on. Twelve o'clock struck, and the reflection that it brought another day to

the sum of those left behind never to be recalled, turned his reflections to another channel. What are we, fellow dweller on the earth? A little washed-up driftweed, that will soon be carried off by the ocean that so mysteriously rolls closer and closer, each wave of which moves with a force we are ignorant of, both as to its purpose and motion.





CHAPTER XI.

EDWARD ST. JOHN was obliged to go into mourning for his brother, and he disliked it. It was to him such utter hypocrisy, that he recoiled from it. He and Isadore had not met for years, and now he was about to be put into his brother's place, to be the coming squire, instead of a younger son. However, there was one good thing—he would have an increased allowance.

Gabriel did not take the fact of his eldest son's death nearly so easy. He had loved the elder. There was a sort of dash about Isadore that Edward lacked ; but, then, if Edward took up a thing he usually carried it through, and only those who have lived with dilatory people can tell the hate they bear to those who are not dilatory. Gabriel did not hate Edward ; he only tolerated him.

So Edward went into mourning ; but before he bought the bulk of his gloves, etc., he inquired for the oldest inhabitant in the drapery line to deal with. He found on inquiry that at Littledale was a dealer who knew every one's business, was sixty-three, and very much given to gossip. Edward went and discovered that he remembered John Penny very well, and, on a little pumping, Jacob also ; that Jacob died suddenly, and there had been unpleasantness at Stratton Manor with John. Beyond this he could not be got to speak.

Edward determined to seek further, but before doing so he thought, "I will try at home." So the next morning he began the attack at breakfast.

" You were telling me the other day, father, it was fitting I looked to things more. I have looked, and in some of the leases I find the name of Jacob Penny as steward. Was he any relation to John Penny you so kindly kept on as under-keeper when he was no good ? "

Memory opened a very uncomfortable leaf for Gabriel to look at, but he tried to turn it over, as he usually did his difficulties.

" Yes ; he was his son. I tried to make the

young man steady when I knew him, many years ago, but he left Stratton."

" Then he was never steward ? "

" No, he was not. His father died. After the old man was dead his precious son came to me to ask for money down for a great discovery he pretended he had made. I sent him flying. Six months afterwards his sister, a very pretty girl, came. Your poor dear mother and she got quarrelling like women will, and the girl fainted or pretended to faint. When she came to, no one could make anything of the matter. The fly-man had driven off. She said she had left a parcel of papers in the fly; driver said she didn't, and I could not tell which was right."

" Did not old Jacob tell you, then, of the papers ? "

" No. For a silly reason, he chose to be very high and haughty before he died. We only spoke on matters of business for some time."

" Do you think anything was taken out of the deed chest ? "

" No, no, my boy; I always kept the key of that chest."

“Was there any other place you know of ?”

“Yes ; but it was in the drawing-room, and when I found it, it was empty.”

“I should have thought that it would have contained something.”

“Then you would have thought wrongly, for I looked with the greatest care and found nothing. You can look, if you like, to-morrow.”

“Why not to-day ?”

Gabriel sighed. The leaves of the past would be stirred by the sight; but the energy of his younger son carried all before it.

They ascended to the drawing-room. The third rose from the top in the panelling of the mantle-piece brought a piece of the marble out with it, disclosing a hole about eight inches square and two feet deep. Edward thrust in his hand. He felt nothing ; but, striking a match, he observed the joints were not very closely put together. A piece of paper was put in apparently to fill a joint. Edward pulled it out. It was a rude drawing, faded with age. As he looked at it Gabriel sighed, and thought he would now be at peace, as a further search revealed nothing more. Far from it ; an

adjournment was moved to the library by Edward, to elucidate matters still further.

When they were once more seated, he produced the two documents he had found in the chest and their translations. As he read them Gabriel listened with a listless air; but as his son proceeded, he became intensely interested. He seemed a new man. He was taken aback when Edward told him the memorable conversation with John Penny.

Edward now took from the table the paper he had found, but to his surprise the lines were gone; it was perfectly blank. A closer inspection showed nothing more. Although it was warm weather, a fire burnt in the grate. The piece of blank paper was carefully placed on the mantle-shelf.

Gabriel said at length, "What more can you do?"

"Why, go to-morrow to all the churches and get the certificates of the birth, death, and marriage of the members of the family. From the time of James the Second we have been here; ever since then can be no difficulty."

"Except about the second son's issue," said Gabriel. "I am not hopeful in the matter."

"Well, father, I have thought of this matter before. I cannot go to law except with your money, so we must work together, unless I can get Smith to advance a thousand pounds or so."

"You certainly are very foolish indeed if you think landed estates of eight thousand pounds a year can be fought for with a thousand pounds. Find out if there is a good chance, and, if so, I will sink or swim with you."

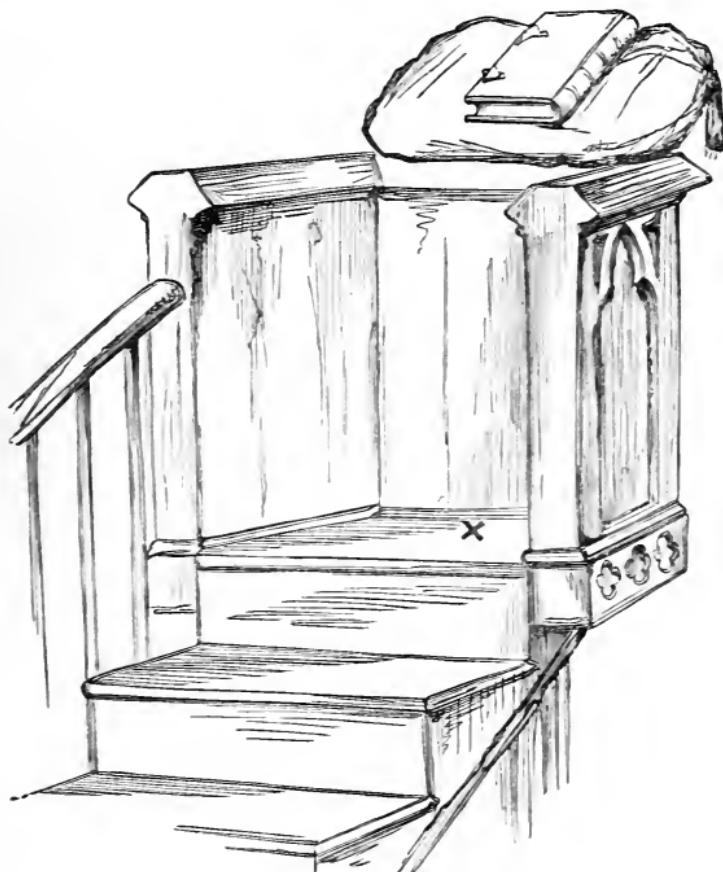
Edward's eyes were moist ; he comprehended the wrench to his father from his quiet life to the turmoil of a contested title and estate. He grasped the old man's hand, and was about to speak, when he pointed in astonishment to the chimney-piece. *The lines had reappeared on the paper !* Gabriel smiled a smile of superior wisdom.

"It is sympathetic writing," he said. "Hold it to the fire."

"What is that?"

"Writing that only shows with the heat. There was a fire in the drawing-room yesterday to air the room ; I thought it smelt damp. The concealed chamber got hot, and held the heat longer, being shut in."

The rude drawing was a mere sketch roughly executed. Gabriel sat down; he was thinking of the future. He pictured himself a power in the



land, his son a county member. Edward suggested a turn till dinner-time and departed. Both were so excited they felt a pause necessary.

Gabriel still sat in silence. The solving of the riddle of the sympathetic writing set his brain in a whirl. He thought it a lucky omen. He had never been a man of very deep religious thought, consequently he was superstitious. When looking at the many examples that history furnishes, one fact stands out with dreadful prominence, that when a nation or a man have no longer a real, burning faith, the ashes of superstition still linger. The noble of the Middle Ages, finding that every one he seemed to come in contact with had his price, brought his soul to the awful belief that the Almighty could be induced by gold to give him a favourable reception. When Moses was on the Mount, the faith of the Israelites died and became ashes. The calf of gold was their god, they were compelled to drink it in their water; and ever since the children of this world have been drinking water, not as it descends from the mountain in bubbling springs bright from the hand of God, but mingled with the sordid golden dust of human superstitions.

Gabriel was above what he called the superstition of the many, but in his heart no peasant, however ignorant, was more affected by omens and

signs. The dark superstition spread over the fairest part of his soul like the black Caaba stone at Mecca, that overshadows some of the fairest spots of the earth, trampling all underfoot. "After the Turk grows no grass." Beneath his sway the grand forest and beauty of the harvest die away, and are seen no more; the earth can no longer render her grateful incense.

Edward walked out. He went again to the churchyard, and gave the sexton money to cut away the weeds and clear the gravestone of John Penny. He lingered near the stone and mused—"My bond of union to John began in a lie—will it ever prosper?" but inheriting one quality of his father's mind, he turned over the leaf and looked forward. The village appeared smaller than usual. His mind filled with ambition; in the distance he saw a great advance to wealth and honour. He then thought of Clara; John's grave had suggested the idea. He turned into the road. "Yes," he thought, "if she and her brothers help me, they shall be subsidized." He had a vague idea she cared for him. She could not, he argued, expect to be a lord's wife; she could have—— And then

his thoughts became blacker ; but he put them aside for the present, and whilst thus lingering and thinking, the dinner bell rang. He retraced his steps. This time he was careful not to look at the gravestone as he passed.

He found his father more sprightly than he had known him for years. The old man amused him, and he felt a thrill of what he thought was affection cross his mind ; but it was only thanks for the present gratification. The meal was finished in silence ; the presence of the servants forbade confidential conversation. With the dessert the two men drew nearer the fire.

“ What do you think ? ” at length said Gabriel.

“ I think that time is pressing, and the sooner we begin the better.”

“ No,” said his father. “ Let me advise a little caution. We will drive over and buy some boots of the interesting cobblers. It may smooth the way.”

And with that nothing more was said on the engrossing subject till the next morning.



CHAPTER XII.

It was a bright morning; the dew hung on the grass in diamond drops of resplendent beauty. James took down the shutters. Robert was already cleaning the stock, and business soon commenced. Various customers came in and were suited.

“We must get more stock,” said Robert.

“Yes, we are running low. What do you think our venture will be this time?”

“Can’t tell.”

“One-third. We have all but money enough. I counted it last night—nearly fifty pounds.”

Matthew came in and looked round, pleased at the diligence displayed.

“Do you know,” said he, “I shall go to Salisbury to-morrow; fresh stock is awaiting me there.”

Both brothers looked downcast.

"We hoped to share it, Matthew, with you," said James, as the eldest; "we have nearly fifty pounds."

"Silly boys, so you shall; but another stroke of business awaits you two. I have made out a list of the neighbouring villages; they are six in number. You shall go to three each every fortnight. You shall draw lots, because you will reap an extra allowance on what you sell on these expeditions."

Matthew wrote the names on slips of paper; each drew three, but it so happened a mutual exchange gave to James three on the north side, Robert three on the south.

"You will walk the first trip and carry no stock, but merely distribute handbills stating when you will be there in future."

The door opened and Clara came in. She looked more beautiful than she had ever done. She had awoke to the fact that she was a woman; she had plucked the tree of knowledge. New ideas, thoughts, and sensations swept the chords of her soul like the fingers of the wind drawing a wild weird melody

from the *Aeolian* harp. She seemed endowed with new vitality; apparently the tree of life stood before her ready to pluck. Oh, woman! is it strange that thy power is almost omnipotent; that the enchantment of thy eyes should cause the strong man to melt, the determined man often to become as clay in the hands of the potter?

All three looked up. Matthew cast his eyes over the nearly perfect form with rapture. He thought of another she so resembled, and rebellious thoughts of a blighted life passed through his brain, and for nearly the first time Matthew sighed "It might have been," in the instant that Eunice flashed before his mental vision; but a childlike faith cast out the spirit of discontent, and, turning round, he smilingly asked what she wanted.

"Well, Matthew, I want you to go and see Mrs. Parkhouse. She is much upset. Her brother, whom she has not heard of for years, wants her to go and live with him."

"Well, I will go to her; but she must wait till Mr. Clark comes back, and who knows when that may be?"

Clara's colour rose at the name of the Rev.

Cyrus. She knew not why; she certainly did not care for him, except that he was superior to those she usually came in contact with. The grace of a cultured mind sat on him. The attentions of Edward St. John had not been of the same sort. In the first place, he had always been careful "not to commit himself." The interviews that had frightened Jane Parkhouse had been chiefly with reference to Clara's past life, which he had skilfully drawn from her nearly entire. She had an uneasy feeling he was not talking to her for herself, but with an ulterior object. When with him she always felt as if with a master. Still there had been sufficient ambiguity in his speech to be interpreted by a very sanguine hearer as the conversation of one who desired a nearer and dearer name. Now, with Cyrus there was nothing of this. There was no mistaking the light of those earnest eyes, even in their greatest self-abasement; and when he described an event from history, his face lighted up with enthusiasm or his voice quivered with the achievements described or the pathos of the story. Still he had not filled the heart of his hearer. He had only stirred the waters,

but he had stirred them deeply and given new life, as the heavenly bodies draw the water of the ocean with their mighty power, and wake in the heaving breast of the element emotions never again to sleep in perfect repose ; but the river that rushes down within its depths mingles and becomes a part of itself, never more to be separated, while the orbs of heaven still remain distant and sometimes invisible.

It has been often observed that the more impetuous of the parents are resembled most by their children ; and as Eunice Maunder had gradually faded away, the last of her children drew a larger portion of her mind and character from her father. Clara inherited the inflexible determination of her father, mingled with his fertility of resource, but overshadowed by a certain sensuous love of self and ease. As each of these characteristics came to the surface in turn, it would have given any observant parent cause for fear and anxious thought. Not so Matthew ; he imagined that the resemblance of body carried an undoubted affinity of mind. He invested his dead love with all virtues, and looked at the

daughter as the living image in mind and body. No doubt resemblance of body does argue an undoubted resemblance of mind. The ingredients possibly are the same, but the proportions may be different. Every virtue and its corresponding vice shade into one another by insensible gradations, when the character receives a bias in either direction. Every vice may be shaded into its corresponding virtue by those who rivet up their armour with resolution and follow their great leader in the dust and heat of the battle of life, and, disregarding the standards of wealth and praise of men that rise and fall with the hands that hold them, “follow where the white plume leads on the way,” like the Huguenots at the battle of Ivry.

Clara was by no means pleased at the change from the vicarage to Matthew’s house. We all like a home bright with taste and beauty, and the vases on the library mantelpiece, full of beautiful waving grasses, hung with trailing pieces of briony and its scarlet berries, was a good deal better to look at than the two brass candlesticks, flanked on one side by the box Matthew kept his tobacco in and two of his pipes, on the other side by a piece of china

representing a shepherd and shepherdess, resplendent with gilt lines and shades of red distributed in an impartial manner all over them. In the centre a cheap American clock, that ticked loudly, brought back painfully the memory of the marble timepiece surmounted by a bronze figure of Time ploughing. Clara hoped she would have to go back to see Jane ; and if she did, she thought, she would not return in a hurry to the china daubs, brass candlesticks, and vulgar clock. The mantle-pieces, of course, were on a par with the other arrangements of the two houses. So, looking anything but satisfied, she still remained at the door, while James and Robert went on arranging the stock of boots and shoes. Matthew took up his hat and departed. James said, as soon as he was gone—

“ Good news, Clara ! We are going to be great wholesale men, and supply all the county with shoes.”

With the hopefulness of youth, he looked at the summit of the mountain of success, bright with the rays of hope, shining like the top of Mont Blanc in white glory ; he forgot the crevasses and toil of ascension.

"Yes. I am going to start to-morrow to leave bills and announcements," said his brother.

"But you can't carry stock on your back. You will want a carriage to take it in, and then I can go with you sometimes."

"Yes, miss; but you must carry a good big parcel in your lap, and sit on another. I can't waste room, or else my little brother will sell more than I, and that will never do," he said with a smile.

"'Little brother's' going to old Bates's with his shoes; so good morning," said Robert, and went out.

Clara pouted; her dreams were rudely broken. The idea of her, Clara, nursing boots and shoes! Besides, they smelt anything but nice. But having an idea she wanted to carry out, she said nothing.

"James, do you know Cassy Bright?"

"Yes, I do. What then?"

"She is going away, and wants a place for Jane, her niece, a little brown girl that binds for the shop."

"Well, what then?"

"Well, I thought it would be a good plan to have her here. I could teach her——"

"To be idle and do nothing. Not a good idea ; Jane is very industrious at present."

"No, Mr. Saucebox ; teach her what is wanted to be done in a house. She could help me, and in the evenings do binding, as she does now. Jane told me she couldn't hear of a place ; no one would have her. She knows nothing except how to bind shoes and peel potatoes."

James paused, and thought the household could not go on very long as it was. A woman came in once a week ; all the other arrangements were the joint productions of Matthew, his brother, and himself. An extended business meant no time for necessary household arrangements.

"I will ask Matthew when he comes back. Jane wouldn't want much wages," he remarked half to himself.

"That's what I hate ; always money, money, money ! Matthew's as bad as you are ; every penny skinned and schemed over. If you are doing so well, what's the use ? Money means enjoyment."

"The spending of it, I suppose ?"

"No, I don't. The chimney-piece in the parlour is enough to make one sick, with the old

clock that ticks so loud, dirty pipes, and trumpery candlesticks that have to be cleaned every other day. I should like vases for flowers or grass."

"And a footman to dress them every day, like Stratton Manor."

"No, not like that. Unlike a pig-sty."

"Robert and I are happy in the pig-sty."

"So you may be; you have never seen anything better."

James looked hurt and very grave, but the thought that he had somewhat contributed by his retorts to her petulance made him hold his tongue. Silence ensued. A slight noise at the doorway caused them both to look up for a customer, but no customer appeared.

"Come, Clara, don't be cross. We'll have the vases some day, and fill them with flowers fresh and bright, nice wild flowers and waving grass, and the clock dressed prettly with cut paper falling over it. I should not like to part with the shell on the top, because it once belonged to mother; but money is very hard to get, and harder to keep. What were I and Robert, what should we all be now, if it was not for Matthew? He took us and treated us like

a"—“father” he was going to say, but the memory of his father made him pause and alter the word to—“good genius.”

“Well, get him to take Jane and I’ll never say any more about the candlesticks. I hope he will soon come. I am tired of waiting; waiting is such dull work.”

“Yes; but the Pyramids were built a brick at a time.”

“Oh yes; there is always some saying to show it is proper I should not have what I want. But, I say, James, try and get Matthew to have Jane. She would be such a help in the house, and I am quite sure Rebecca, who comes once a week, eats enough for a fortnight.”

“No, she doesn’t.”

“I say she does.”

“Do you know what she does with it?”

“Puts it in her mouth, I suppose.”

“She takes it home to her three little children; she hardly eats anything. One day I found her nearly fainting at the top of the stairs, when she had carried a bucket up to scrub one of the top rooms, so I got it out of her. She had eaten

nothing all day ; she had saved it all up in a dirty rag to carry home. Well, I told Matthew, and he gave her leave to take all the bits away."

" Well, there were not many bits, I should think ? "

" No ; but Matthew always makes a lot since. I saw him one night breaking up loaves into pieces and putting them in the pan."

Clara's twisted conscience pricked her ; the thought of the three hungry children unfed was an uncomfortable prospect.

" Why don't Rebecca go to the Union ? "

" Because if she did the guardians would try and find her husband, and put him in prison for deserting his wife and children."

" I don't want Jane," said Clara, faintly.

James kissed his sister. She did not smell the leather now ; her mind was absorbed in the story she had heard.

" Don't grieve ; I will ask Matthew about Jane."

" No, you shan't."

" Yes, I will. Farmer Bates said last week he would take Rebecca to live at the farm, and the children could go to field work ; they are big enough, he says."

"How nice! And it will be all right, after all. But you had no business to tell me that dreadful story if all the trouble was over."

"I thought worse troubles than even brass candlesticks and dirty pipes on the mantelpiece overtook some people."

"And so you meant to humble me."

James was again silent; the tone was not encouraging by any means. Clara went back to the despised parlour, and sulkily went on with her work. James's speech was perfect on the house arrangements, but his thoughts took another direction: "Rebecca does take a lot every week; it costs a lot of money. We shall save that now. Jane can bind; we can pay her for the binding and give her her food; it will be a great saving. Perhaps she will bind for half price if she lives in the house, and can lend a hand at odd times to cut the cloth into shape for slippers—those are the only things we make now—and then I and Robert can make at least five more pair a week. Clara always wants to spend money; I and Robert don't. By the end of the year we shall have nearly a hundred pounds. I wonder if it would be best to

buy a house? There is one to be sold in Down Street; the people pay three and sixpence a week. I dare say I and Bob could get it for ninety pounds, and then old Dick Summers could live there. He pays five shillings where he is now; I dare say he would pay us five shillings. No fear of the rent; we could deduct every Saturday, and then he could not row about repairs;" and a hard smile crossed his face, in which there was no merriment. "Thirteen pounds a year for ninety pounds, how prime!" and with the idea of wealth, harder and more avaricious dreams filled his mind. The way seemed long, but he looked forward with confidence and determination; and in order to shorten the way, he at once overcharged a shiftless neighbour a shilling on a pair of boots he sold him. Poor human nature! the lust of gold soon gains the upper hand, when the citadel of the heart is not held by a higher spirit, who, like Ithuriel, can by the touch of his spear put the evil thing to flight. As the customer departed, James thought to himself, "It is not for myself; it is for Robert and Clara." There is no weapon so fatal to truth as self-deception.

Robert was in good spirits ; he had effected a sale and returned empty handed.

The usual events of the day succeeded one another until after the five o'clock tea. Matthew proposed that the brothers and sister should take a walk. They did so, and on their return Matthew greeted them with a smile of welcome peculiarly bright. Clara went upstairs to pull off her bonnet and jacket. Coming down again, they all went in to supper. There a surprise awaited them : the parlour was transformed. The clock had a mixture of cut tissue-paper cast round it ; four vases stood on the mantelpiece filled with grass and flowers ; the table-cloth half covering the table showed at the end another over the bare deal, Clara's special abhorrence ; three pictures decorated the walls. Even Matthew's case of books looked brighter for these surroundings. Each of those books contained a history which, if written, might strike the most careless observer on the highway of life. Some were odd volumes, many owed one of their covers to Matthew's ingenuity, but all looked neat and tidy. Living so many years a solitary life, he had been driven to some resource. In their dog's-

eared and often soiled pages Matthew had sought, and not in vain, for a better and purer society, among the mighty dead, than the limited choice of Littledale afforded for companionship in the living. In the records of the lives of heroes or martyrs the spirit had gained an additional strength to carry on its purpose from day to day. The petty annoyances of life fell powerless on the man whose spirit, shielded by the mighty dead, defied the shafts of ignorance and pride.

"You listened," said Clara, and smiled with moist eyes as she remembered her speeches of the morning.

"Sit down," replied the master of the house.

Robert rose to draw the ale, as was usually his custom, when Matthew rang the bell and said, "Sit down."

The door opened; all raised their eyes, as a maid, small, brown, and rather ordinary looking, came in. Her dress was a combination, not of the rainbow, but the rags of the district; but it was clean, and the brown skin shone through a bright aurora of yellow soap. Her hair, tied in a knot at the back of the head, was neat and tidy. She bore in her hand the jug of ale.

“Jane Bright!” burst from the lips of Robert in surprise.

James said nothing, but smiled a smile of superior wisdom.

The supper proceeded. Clara was in ecstasies; her day-dream had come true. Matthew looked on with a subdued smile, and the whole story came out—that Matthew was at the door when James and Clara were talking.

After supper James and Robert went into the shop. The house project was discussed with much gusto between them. Clara thanked Matthew in a way that went to his heart; he felt more than rewarded. She felt she could not sleep till she had made it up with James, so, following him, she found him and Robert talking louder than they intended in their excitement. Their voices were insensibly raised.

“I can get thirteen pounds a year for it safe,” said James.

“Yes,” said Robert, without thinking, “and if Matthew is getting so extravagant we had best look to ourselves indeed.”

Avarice was speedily eating up all their virtues.

Clara turned away; the little altercation of the morning allowed the wedge of discord to enter her soul.

“Henceforth they can go their way and I mine,” she murmured, as she retired to her room. “Let them love their gold and be happy; I do not intend to grovel after them.”

The justness of James’s rebukes made her all the more ready to pick a hole in their justice. If the salt that is flung at us touches our sores, we always try and make out those who flung it are more sore than we are. The spirit of the Pharisee is as rampant now as it was eighteen hundred years ago.





CHAPTER XIII.

JOSHUA SMITH sat in his office much the same year after year. The crow's-feet got a little deeper ; the hair began to show a sprinkling of silver ; but the fire of his eye was bright as ever, his step as firm. The tin cases increased in number ; the names painted on them increased in social importance. He had thriven and looked forward to see his son a gentleman of landed property. The money he had let James Maunder have was not his own, but that of clients ; but he had repaid it all, and, by the sale of one or two bits of land that ran into that of other owners, had secured a sum of ready money that he turned with profit and expedition. His arena of operations was small, but he was thereby enabled to more surely gauge the solvency of those he did business with. He never dabbled in bills

of sale ; they were too public a mode of transaction ; but he did better. He dealt on a new and improved method. The farmers were always in want of money ; Joshua would lend small sums on note of hand. He would always leave a balance to be settled, which ended in the profits of a good year being swallowed up to clear the same. He would lend on the security of growing crops. Only one client had ever tried to slip his obligation in the matter. Next day, a letter was posted to the offender, which, by a strange coincidence of course, was unsealed. The postmaster was soon as much at home in the affair as any one. Thence it travelled to the Feathers, was duly discussed, and finally filtered all through the community. The end of it was the offender had to sell off everything ; his creditors had become clamorous, and insisted on being paid. The man was ruined. Joshua bought a part of the stock and took the farm ; put in a man under his thumb, who had to move exactly as Joshua told him. So the loss became a gain. The story at last got wind, and those who had dealings with Joshua were very careful not to offend in a like manner.

Harold Smith was not tied too closely to the desk. It was not fitting that the future Harold Smith, Esq., of the Grange, and owner of land in the district, should be too closely identified with a rigid attention to the law, so he took his work easily.

Not so the clerk, Maurice Jones. Joshua kept him tightly to the desk. It was not much trouble, for Maurice had a natural taste for chicanery and intrigue when connected with getting money. He was not absorbed in money, but he saw in it a mighty lever to move the world before him. If Joshua had his ambition, Maurice had his; he looked forward to the time when he might make a grand *coup* and depart to London, the goal of his ambition, not as a poor clerk, but as a man with money and brains to push his way. He had heard wonderful stories of how men had got on; but he had seen some who had gone back and returned to their native place beggared in enterprise and purse, and he thought he saw the first qualification was a sum of money to start with. So he waited and watched. He had quite easily bored a hole in the wall, and in Harold's frequent absences learned

more by listening than Joshua was aware of, or would have been pleasant. But he never used his knowledge. At most he might have got a few pounds hush-money, and shortly his discharge, when Joshua heard of it. The money would be, but the discharge was not, to his taste. He intended to discharge himself. With that end he always took his money weekly, so that a week's non-receipt of the same would enable him to snap his fingers at his master. His visits to the Feathers cost him nothing, as he helped to keep the accounts, that is copy them out. Mrs. Tyack trusted nobody with the manipulation of the first copy in the ledger except herself. But Maurice could write dunning letters in a legal form, and frighten a contumacious customer, which letters John Tyack always attributed to a misconstruction of orders. He never wrote or ordered them to be written, which every one knew to be true, as Mrs. Tyack managed the books and wore the garment supposed to belong to the sterner sex. Maurice had also other means of adding to his wages. Did a neighbour wish a will made, who so ready as Jones to draw it up? His fee was smaller than his master's and his reticence unimpeachable.

With regard to the softer sex he was quite as useful. Several swains inclined to shilly-shally with the question of marriage had their ideas much quickened by the timely visits of Maurice, who brought them to the point in a very satisfactory manner. The happy husband was sometimes surprised to find that a certain five-pound note lasted no time ; but other affairs usually supervened, and no inquiry ever quite elicited the fact that he had paid the costs of his own coercion.

Once or twice he tried to get an introduction and footing in houses where he had been useful to the mistress, but invariably failed. Neither the man nor the woman cared to have an everyday remembrance of the past brought before them. A trial of a higher tone failed altogether to bring the desired event to pass, as it was invariably the case that past services were denied or ignored ; so he lived a rather lonely life. People only tolerated him when they wanted him. As he was alone in the world, he missed the healthy influence of family life and affection. He saw only the worst side of human nature, but he did not fall into the mistake of thinking it was all bad ; he only saw that the

evil side of human nature is more easily moved than the good, and determined to use it as a lever to move the obstacles from his path and advance his own interests.

He had frequently tried to get on more intimate terms with James and Robert, but their frugal habits and quiet mode of life frustrated his efforts. They neither required to get out of scrapes nor borrow money, so Maurice was, to use his own expression, “done.” He still kept up an acquaintance with Matthew, his old landlord, and very judiciously called but seldom. He suddenly be-thought himself that he had not done so lately, so on the next morning he presented himself at the boot and shoe dépôt.

The bow windows looked bright and clean as they always did, and he found James ready to attend to a customer, which Maurice perceiving, feigned a device to look at a pair of boots. James’s dislike of the man rather softened under the influence of a possible sale, so, reaching down a pair of boots, Maurice proceeded to try them on.

“These are really the best thing we have at present, Mr. Jones. We shall have a fresh supply

in a day or two, but seasoned goods are best ; they last longer and keep in their proper shape so much better."

" Yes, I think that pair will do. What is the price ? "

" Well, they are marked in plain figures 'fifteen shillings' on the sole ; you can see for yourself."

" Very well ; put them by for me, and I will call for them in the course of the day and pay for them."

" Thank you, sir. Anything in slippers to-day ? "

" No, not to-day ; at least, not at present."

This conversation was carried on behind a red curtain that separated the customer being fitted from the customer coming to buy. Just then a carriage drove up, and two more customers came in.

" Go to your other customers," said Maurice.

James went forward to attend and found two gentlemen. They were Gabriel and Edward St. John.

" Good day, Mr. Maunder. Can I see Mr. Elgood ? "

" No," said James, " but I can fetch him."

James departed. Maurice did not ; he was invisible, or nearly so, behind the curtain. James found Matthew at the house of Price, the auctioneer, trying boots on the four little Prices. It was rather a long job ; so, leaving James to finish, he returned to the shop, unaware of the listener behind the curtain.

“Good day, Mr. Elgood. Will you please send over to Stratton Manor, on Monday morning, some boots and shoes for my son and myself, also a few pairs of footmen’s pumps ?”

“Yes, sir. What price can I send them at ?”

“That I leave to you. I am not afraid to be in your hands,” said Gabriel, with a pleasant smile and courteous inclination of the head.

Matthew, much pleased at the new connection (he had never supplied them before), said—

“Had I not better just measure your foot ?”

“Certainly,” said Gabriel, and he sat down on one of the shop chairs.

Matthew knelt down and took the measure.

“I think that was young Maunder I saw just now.”

"It was, sir."

"Does he suit you? Is he diligent and careful?"

"Yes," said Matthew, wondering.

"Because I knew his father some years ago and am interested in the family."

Edward was judiciously silent by agreement.

"Yes, they are not what they might have expected to be, sir."

"No; but they may rise. They have a good friend in you, and teaching them frugality and industry, they may rise to their proper position in life."

Matthew was filled with a vague hope of he knew not what. Did Mr. Gabriel really come to put forward the suit of his son? Did he favour the project of Edward marrying Clara?

"Well, sir, I hope they will always be able to earn a comfortable subsistence, with their moderate tastes."

"Yes. But they may look to something better, I hope, some day. We cannot lose so old and respected a family altogether."

"If I could see a way to put them forward, I should be glad to embrace the opportunity."

"Can I speak to you privately a minute?"

Matthew led the way to the parlour at the back. Edward took possession of the chair, with his back to the red curtain but his face to the shop door to guard against interruption, ignorant of the unseen listener. The parlour door was open, but Gabriel made no motion to shut it. Matthew did not like to; it seemed like shutting out Edward St. John altogether.

"You see, Elgood, that very often these old families have papers and documents that, in the hand of a powerful friend, would secure them a portion of their rights, if not all. A lawyer merely looks at them as a possible case to make money of. Now, a friend looks with a better eye. He does not so much look to the costs as to a chance of benefiting those concerned."

Matthew's brain clouded with anxious thought. He was almost tempted to get the papers he remembered Eunice had entrusted to his keeping. The tempter saw the puzzled look, and said quite unconcernedly—

"If you know where there are any, I will look at them for the benefit of James Maunder's family."

It is, moreover, very important it should be done before they are of age, so that steps may be taken in time to give full effect when it arrives."

These words, accompanied with a persuasive smile, decided Mathew. He said—

"I have a few papers in my possession, but first I must request you to promise that they shall be left in my care, whatever they may prove to be, at all events for the present."

"Certainly, Elgood. Your caution does you credit, and I give the promise you wish with the utmost pleasure. What can I want them for?"

Matthew went upstairs. Gabriel nodded and looked at Edward, who rubbed his hands with glee. These motions were not lost on Jones, through whose active brain the thought flashed—

"Of course, Mauder married the sister of the son of St. John's old steward. There was a row about some papers years ago; they are worth money. Do St. John and his son intend to take them by force? If so, I shall help Matthew, or be paid for silence. My grand *coup* has come at last."

Matthew brought down a small packet, very

dirty, but neatly tied up. He opened it carefully. The first thing was a list of the St. John property and the value per annum of the leases on the estate. Gabriel trembled with eagerness ; thrice he tried to speak, but could not. At length, in a husky voice of subdued emotion, he said—

“ Could you wait one minute ? I don’t feel well. I will go in the open air.”

Gabriel rose to his feet and walked out unsteadily ; he could not trust himself to speak, even to his son. He recognized the papers so long lost. If he paid for them, it would cost money. Besides, he felt if they were claimed by the strong arm of the law, the re-possession of them would have a less dubious appearance. He walked out along the street to the house of the policeman, who lived five doors off. Matthew followed him, wondering why he walked so unsteadily. Edward also went to the door, and spoke to the footman with the horse.

This was a golden opportunity not to be lost. Maurice, with his boots in his hand, went in, snatched the papers, still carrying his boots, went through the parlour, undid the back door softly,

and went into the lane at the back of the house. Quickly putting on his boots, he went, by a series of short cuts only known to a resident, to a field near, thrust the papers for the present under a stone in the hedge, and went to the office as quietly as he could. No one saw him come in; so, quietly continuing the draft he had left the day before half finished, he resumed work with apparently a quiet mind. Harold came in and a conversation followed, in the course of which Maurice alluded to the time.

“Who would have thought you had been in half an hour, sir? Time slips away in talk. I must go on copying,” he said.

Gabriel was not long at the house of the guardian of the public peace, who with alacrity came with him. Matthew in wondering silence walked between them, apparently by accident, really by design. They entered the shop, and Edward’s heart beat with joyous throbs. Directly they were inside, Gabriel said—

“John Pomeroy, I desire you take some papers belonging to me that you will find on the table inside.”

Matthew turned white with suppressed emotion.

“What do you mean?”

“Best be careful. What you say may be used against you,” said the officer.

The officer and Gabriel went in, closely followed by Matthew and Edward. THE PAPERS WERE GONE!

“If you had given them up quietly, I should not have prosecuted; but as it is, I shall give you in charge.”

The officer touched Matthew on the shoulder and produced handcuffs, the sight of which caused Matthew to speak.

“Mr. St. John, you know what you said. They never were yours; it’s a trick and a lie.”

“Best be quiet. I shall have to repeat all this,” said Pomeroy.

“I followed Mr. St. John into the street, and could not have touched the papers. Mr. Edward was in the shop.”

“Come on,” said Pomeroy, who saw a possibility of future promotion.

The case was getting interesting. A search throughout the house produced no result. The only other member of the force by this time had

arrived. Being a man of quicker perceptions, he said—

“Magistrates are now sitting, it being Saturday, at the hall.”

“Very good, Gilbert; we will go at once.”

The procession started. On Matthew's solemn promise, the handcuffs were not put on.

Sir Lawrence Bunkum was in the chair. The usual case of a wife's black eye had been disposed of, the husband having got drunk on the drugged beer at the Feathers; but as John Tyack always took the precaution of sending in, gratis, a nice lunch for the magistrates, and one of them being a large brewer, they agreed no blame rested on the landlord. As they entered, the only other case was just disposed of, to the great disgust of a fine-looking ploughman in smock-frock and round hat, who was accused of having anticipated the freedom bestowed by the Church in the matter of conjugal rights. Sir Lawrence had just finished a fine peroration on the iniquity of the proceeding and scandal to the vicinity with a virtue quite heroic. To be sure, his housemaids were often very pretty, and my lady had a very frightened, subdued look;

but he had endowed some of the best looking with a marriage portion when they married, severely punished their husbands when they beat them, and if my lady sometimes had weak eyes and wore a shade after he came home drunk, people only shrugged their shoulders. It is often quite easy to be wicked and respectable, if rich ; but to be poor, tempted, and fall, is dreadfully wrong.

The magistrates were languishing for something to do when Gabriel St. John, his son, and the prisoner entered. Matthew was promptly placed in the dock. Joshua, who acted as clerk to the magistrates, looked very wise, and shook his head. It was a sad thing, to be sure, but if it had not been for that troublesome Matthew, he could have shipped off all the young Maunders to another part of the country. Their presence was disagreeable to Joshua. So he looked as if he knew it all along, and it did not surprise him in the least. We usually think badly of those who even innocently thwart us in our schemes and ideas.

Gabriel, on being sworn, deposed as follows :—
“ He had called on the prisoner Matthew Elgood on business, and that being concluded they had

entered into conversation. Matthew had told him he possessed papers, which he offered to look at as a favour, but with the stipulation that he (Matthew) should retain possession, as they related to the family affairs of some one else."

"Who?" interrupted the chairman, prompted by the clerk.

"The deceased Mr. Mauder, of the Grange."

Joshua got very red and his interest redoubled.

"Instead of that, he found they were papers of his own, stolen years before by the fraudulent son of his father's steward, the father of the wife of the late Mr. Mauder. Mrs. Mauder, before she was married, had made overtures for their restoration, but he had not been able to regain possession of them. On finding her demands not complied with, she pretended to faint, and made away with them in the confusion. He offered on their restoration to take no criminal proceedings, but certainly he could not offer money for his own property, so he had fetched John Pomeroy, now present. On their return the papers were gone. A search in the prisoner's house had resulted in nothing but the fact of the disappearance of the papers."

John Pomeroy, p.c., deposed to the fact of arresting the prisoner, who seemed much confused. On being arrested he was abusive to Mr. St. John and called him a liar.

Gabriel looked up meekly, and the three magistrates exchanged glances of indignation. Just then James Maunder came forward; he had returned from the Prices', and followed Matthew.

"Do you know anything?" said the chairman.

"Yes—no," replied James.

"Let him be sworn," said Sir Lawrence significantly.

James Maunder, on being sworn, deposed that he had been in the shop in the morning, and Maurice Jones came in. Having fitted him, he left him in the shop, to fetch Matthew when Mr. St. John came in. How long he remained he could not tell.

"Why?" said Sir Lawrence. "Remember, you are on your oath."

"Because I stayed at Mr. Price's to fit the children with shoes."

Joshua Smith was furious. To bring the name of his clerk into the matter was beyond bearing. But a message was despatched for Maurice, who

very shortly appeared. He was promptly sworn and then examined.

"Did you go to the shop of Matthew Elgood, the prisoner, this morning?"

"I did."

"When did you leave?"

"When Mr. James Maunder did. I had no longer any purpose for staying."

"When did you arrive at Mr. Smith's office?"

"At my usual time. Mr. Harold Smith, who came in shortly afterwards, can prove the truth of what I state."

Just then a little elderly man was seen speaking to the prisoner and passing him a slip of paper. The chairman promptly called out to the stranger—

"Who are you?"

"Silas Pod, solicitor for the prisoner."

Joshua looked at the chairman in a warning manner, and very slightly shook his head. Sir Lawrence was in consequence silent.

Harold Smith arrived, and on being sworn stated that he had arrived at the office and found Maurice busily engaged in copying a draft. They

had fallen into conversation, and had wasted half an hour or so, when Maurice had stated he must go on with his work, which he had done accordingly.

“How do you know it was half an hour?”

“Maurice Jones had casually mentioned the fact.”

“I find,” said Pod, “that Mr. Gabriel St. John was asked no questions. We will therefore, if you please, recall him.”

Gabriel was recalled.

“Can I look at the deposition, or shall Mr. St. John repeat his evidence?” said Pod.

The deposition was handed to him.

“You stated, Mr. Gabriel, in your evidence that you offered to take no criminal proceedings, and afterwards went for the police.”

“I did.”

“That will do.”

John Pomeroy, on being cross-examined, brought the fact to light that it was after, not before.

Gabriel began to think he had made a greater mistake than he thought.

“State, if you please,” said Pod to the policeman, “whom you saw in Matthew Elgood’s shop.”

"Mr. St. John, James Maunder, Matthew Elgood, and Mr. Edward St. John."

"Oh, indeed ! Call Mr. Edward St. John."

He promptly came forward and was sworn.

"You accompanied your father to Matthew Elgood's shop ?"

"I did."

"Did you hear the conversation ?"

"Not all of it."

"Why ?"

"Because I was in the shop and they went into the parlour."

"Could you see them all the time ?"

"Yes." This came rather reluctantly.

"How soon after your father's going out did you see Matthew Elgood follow him ?"

"I can't say exactly."

"Try and give us an idea."

"Not long."

"Now, as the door was open, did you lose sight of Matthew Elgood ?"

"I don't know. I can't say I did."

"Did you stay in the shop all the time ?"

"I did not. Seeing it was empty, I went

out to speak to our footman, who was in the carriage."

"Then no one could have entered without your seeing them?"

"Certainly not."

"Did you give the driver anything?" said Pod, in a meaning manner.

"Most emphatically, no," said Edward with vehemence.

Pod looked at the magistrates. They retired to consult, that is, to receive the instructions of their clerk. Sir Lawrence, on resuming his seat, looked very uneasy, but said in his usually confident tone—

"Prisoner, you are discharged, but I and my brother magistrates feel it right to say there are circumstances of grave suspicion attaching to you in the matter."

Pod took the arm of the nearly unconscious Matthew, who, as if in a dream, was led out. The street was filled with nearly the entire population of Littledale. James had explained the matter to one or two friends, and it quickly filtered through the crowd. Here was a case of a rich

man oppressing a poor man. Their sympathies went with Matthew. He was their townsman ; the other was not, and, what was more, dealt usually neither in Littledale nor Stratton. Cheer after cheer greeted Matthew. He did not seem to hear or care for his deliverance ; he only felt the work of years was destroyed. The papers he so built his hopes on were apparently gone for ever.

Gabriel and Edward St. John came out very quietly, and tried to get to their vehicle in as unobtrusive a manner as possible ; but two or three waifs and strays of humanity, that hung on to the skirts of society, had mysteriously been presented with eggs decidedly of the stalest. One was discharged at the vehicle ; it missed, and covered the horse with a fine white and yellow streak of offensive matter. That egg broke the ice ; many followed, mingled with tufts of grass and dirt.

“Drive on,” said Edward with an oath to the man.

He did drive, but the crowd hemmed them in. Groans and hisses, given with unmistakable emphasis, followed, one or two eggs were thrown that

hit their mark, till Edward, who sat in front, snatched the reins, and, lashing the horse, was soon beyond the reach of the crowd, who, after three cheers for Matthew Elgood, dispersed.

Gabriel, on his arrival at Stratton Manor, was put to bed, and did not get better for some days. As for Edward, he paced up and down like a maniac, cursing Matthew, himself, Clara, and the magistrates in turn. Suddenly his walk was arrested. He thought, "What if we have lost the papers? All is not lost." But a savage look came into his eyes, and then a smile like the calm that precedes a tornado, more awful than its worst fury. He sat down in a chair, and began thinking of a more terrible mode of revenge. Having by no means a high view of the virtues or intellect of women, he thought that sensual gratification at Clara's expense and consequent grief of those who surrounded her was the most feasible. He sat down to dinner, and as he breathed his hopes over the sparkling liquor, his better angel spread her wings and left him to the evil spirits, who are powerless unless invited, and to the dark domain of his own evil thoughts and ideas.

After dinner he went down to Stratton Church, found the sexton, and began his search. He found there the records of the births and deaths of more of his ancestors than he could have hoped to find. Deferring the search at Littledale till another day, he went home and drew out the genealogy as far as he could. He felt he must do something. As he went to wish his father good night, he said—

“Father, you don’t think Matthew hid them?”

“Yes, I do.”

“How?”

“He left them with a neighbour when he followed me. I was a fool not to think of it at the time.”

Edward echoed the thought in his heart, but said nothing.

“Go to London to-morrow,” said the old man, “and get a detective. I will be equal with them all yet.”

“I don’t like to leave you, father,” Edward replied.

“I shall do well enough. Think of the Chiveydale property.”

Next morning Edward departed, and returned alone the mid-day after. His father was better.

"Let me see him," said the old man.

In the course of the day a man called to see if the gentlemen wanted any corns cut. He was of a medium height; hair inclined to be red and cut short; bright brown eyes, but piercing in expression, and scant eyebrows; a little whisker, but otherwise clean shaven. He stayed a long time, but cut no corns; but at his suggestion Edward rang the bell and ordered a basin of hot water, and when the servant came he had one boot off. After a long interview the bell rang and the stranger remarked—

"Well, squire, I'll come and cut your corns in a day or two, when you are better. If you want me you can write. I shall be at Littledale, as I am going to work the district."





CHAPTER XIV.

SILAS Pod and the vicar had completed their journey, as they had anticipated, in time to take a post-chaise at Salisbury and reach Littledale in good time on Saturday morning; but the landlord at Salisbury had a farm, and the horses lent a hand at off times to the plough. So they had to be fetched, and when they arrived they were not particularly fresh. The market day was Tuesday, and this was Saturday; he could easily have borrowed or hired elsewhere, but he knew it entailed a share of the pay. So, wishing to turn an extra profit, he delayed the start, and having lost horses lately, the two put into requisition were none of the best. Had they been decent cattle, and started when the travellers wished, they would have saved

just two hours, which would have made all the difference.

When they came to Littledale, they entered it at the lower end. The streets seemed more silent than usual: the floating population that were usually about were at the Town Hall. Cyrus and Silas entered the shop of Matthew, and found Robert in grief and rage, looking at nothing through the window. Entering the parlour, they saw Clara in grief and terror, attended by Jane Bright, the little handmaid, who rose with the occasion. She had restored the parlour to something like order and to tidiness.

Robert and Clara had gone out in the morning, attended by Jane, to their respective duties. Robert went to a farmer who lived about a quarter of a mile off; Clara to purchase, and Jane to carry home, various marketings for the day's consumption in general and dinner in particular. The fineness of the morning induced Clara to extend her walk with her brother till they came to the house he was going to; she then turned slowly back, and by the time she had returned and made her purchases the tragedy had occurred.

The first thing they saw was Matthew escorted up the town by the policeman, Gabriel and Edward following, and followed in turn by a vagabond contingent of the idlers of the town. They hastened to the shop, and found James just returned. With only a word or two of explanation, he hurried to the Town Hall, as we have seen, leaving Clara and Robert to keep house. It was not long after this that Silas and the vicar arrived. Robert told all he knew, which was not much, but enough to send Silas Pod with extraordinary celerity to the Town Hall, where his arrival very materially contributed to alter the fate of the day.

Cyrus sat in the parlour. A pretty girl in tears is enough to move the stoutest heart, so Cyrus drew near the weeping figure in the armchair. Jane looked knowing—she was quite *au fait* with Littledale gossip—and was going to leave the room and shut the door; but Cyrus, made wise by experience, said—

“ You had better stay; your mistress may want you.”

Jane went to the end of the room and took up a piece of sewing, in which she became absorbed,

oblivous of the fact that there was no thread in the needle, which was only stuck in the hem.

Clara, in her grief, resented the presence of Jane. She resented the carefulness, as she thought, of herself by Cyrus. "He has been with fine friends," she thought. The one with him had a diamond pin in his necktie; and then she thought of the diamond, notwithstanding her terror and grief.

There are a thousand strings to the human heart, of which our nearest and dearest friends know only the notes of a very few, and in their best endeavours very often strike the wrong string and send a jarring chord through the chambers of the soul, when we look for a strain of comfort and harmony amid the contending waters of life. No human skill can make a duet of thoughts run properly for long together. Only across the deep river, beyond the dark portals where our eyes shall open on perfect day, can we be certain that a strain even apparently of heavenly melody is free from the lingering notes of selfishness, self-will, or greed. When the melody floats on our ear, it may sound perfect, even in the echoes it makes, as they sound

across the waters of life. Cyrus saw there was something amiss, and tried to put it right. He imagined it was grief at Matthew's trouble that caused it.

"I've come back to Littledale again, little thinking I should find Matthew in such trouble; but Mr. Pod will no doubt see him through it, Clara."

"Matthew has done no wrong, and therefore he will return proved innocent; but the disgrace will break his heart. No one will take any more notice of him as they did before."

"Yes, they will. I shall, and every one whose opinion is worth having."

"But what will people generally say?"

"Matthew could not be cast down when he has such friends to comfort him and pour the balm of consolation on the wounded spirit. I am sure I should not, if I were in his place."

This was to the point, and Clara, with the natural instincts of a woman, asked—

"What friends?"

Cyrus stammered, coloured, and half gasped out "You," when he bethought himself of Jane

Bright, who, although sewing, was within earshot, and said, "James and Robert."

"Yes, and if he has all these friends at home he will want none from other places."

"But, Clara, I entreat you to look."

Clara did as she was directed, and saw Matthew, Silas Pod, and James coming down the street, escorted by a crowd of friends. They turned in, but as they passed the window Cyrus saw Pod's eyes fixed on him. He shrank back from being seen. Clara interpreted the action as one of shame at being seen with her. She started up and embraced Matthew with more than ordinary effusion. James and Robert both came in and looked at Cyrus; he rose, feeling himself in the way, and went out into the shop. Silas was waiting for him.

"Hasn't plucked up courage to speak," thought Pod, but said nothing.

Pod knocked at the door of the parlour and looked in. He saw a sight he never forgot to his dying day. Matthew was half sitting, half lying in the armchair, white round the mouth and black round the eyes; his breath came in gasps, drawn

with dreadful labour and agony. James held his head up, Robert was chafing his hands alternately, Clara knelt at his feet, and Jane was sprinkling his face with water. He had an attack of they knew not what. Pod spoke with quiet energy to Cyrus.

“Run and get brandy.”

Cyrus ran to the Feathers, and gasped out—

“A bottle of best brandy. Quick !”

In an instant he was flying back, and stumbled against Robert, who was on the way for a doctor, which they had none of them thought of till Silas told them. Cyrus knocked off the neck of the bottle and dashed some into a cup, which Silas introduced between the half-rigid teeth.

“He will die ! he will die !” screamed Clara.

“He will if you make that noise,” said Silas.

“What can I do ?” said Jane, but her lips quivered.

“Get hot water from the kitchen, in a large basin, at once,” said Silas.

But it was not needed. The labouring breath came with less difficulty; it became regular; the eyes unclosed; the black circles around them be-

came less visible. Consciousness returned just as Doctor Henry Black crossed the threshold. He at once ordered Matthew to bed; hot water bottles were applied to his feet, and in half an hour all present danger was over.

James, Robert, and Clara, with Cyrus and Silas, were in the parlour. Jane was watching beside the couch of the invalid. The doctor, with the intuition of his noble calling, saw she was the only one who had her wits about her.

"Put the rest of the brandy in a decanter and have it handy. I will send a draught, a table-spoonful to be given every four hours, if he is awake. If he faints again, which he won't if he is not excited, give him a wine-glassful of brandy;" and the doctor made as if to go.

James tried to slip a guinea in his hand.

"Pooh! nonsense. Send me a pair of easy boots. I will call to-morrow and see him again. I have known Matthew all my life, and am only too glad to be of a little service to him;" and he was gone up the street, with his usually quick, decided step.

Silas and Cyrus also departed. The latter

stepped into the Feathers to pay for the brandy. John wouldn't take the money.

"No, no, sir. I hope it did Matthew good, poor fellow!"

"Shall we stop here and have some lunch? I am very hungry," said Pod.

"No, let's go to the vicarage," answered Cyrus.

They went and found Jane Parkhouse, in a state of lachrymose excitement, with her bonnet on, about departing to see Matthew. She had heard the rumour of the arrest and then of the release. The maid now left in charge got a cold lunch for the gentlemen, who partook of it heartily, and washed it down with a bottle of claret. Their hunger being satisfied, Silas said—

"How about the papers now? Where are they? Can you guess?"

"No, I can't," said Cyrus.

"I can't tell, but I can give a pretty good guess."

"Where, in Heaven's name?"

"Why, Edward St. John quietly handed them out to the coachman when Matthew went out in the street gaping after Gabriel."

“Do you think so ?”

“Yes ; but think and know are different. If we had only had good cattle this morning, we should have been first at the fair ; as it is, we are a day after. I shall stay a day or two to make inquiries. I suppose they air the beds at the Feathers ?”

“Indeed, you will stay here with me.”

“Very well. Your claret’s very good, and I dare say it’s vile at the inn, so I will.”

“Had you not better put it in the hands of the police ?”

Silas laughed out loud. “They are the other side. Besides, I saw that St. John and Sir Lawrence Bunkum were thick as thieves.”

“What are you going to do ?”

“Get a man from London by the next train. If I can, he will be here to-morrow. What time does the post go out ?”

“In an hour’s time.”

“I want to write a letter ; and, what is more, I’ll just look at the church. It can do no harm. One often picks up an idea from the clerk or sexton.”

" You have no need to call for him, as the keys are kept here."

" Yes ; but it is safer always to go in company. Awkward questions are sometimes asked you if you go alone."

Silas sat down, wrote a letter, and posted it himself at the post-office. He soon found the parish clerk was chief assistant to Price, the auctioneer, in the funeral department. In fact, he managed it all, except taking the money ; so he took to snuff in extraordinary quantities, and bemoaned his hard fate that prevented genius from reaping its due, in a pecuniary sense, from a grateful country. Silas Pod carried a snuff-box, but never took any ; it was always filled with the best Irish rappee, not too highly scented—armed with which he presented himself at the Price emporium.

" Can I see Jacob Higgs ? " he asked of a pale youth imprisoned in a little desk that did service as a rostrum on the occasion of an auction, with a box behind to stand on. The box was absent, but a stool was present, on which he reclined, his back against the wall.

" Jacob's at dinner now, sir ; he will be back directly."

Finding it was near the church, Silas betook himself thither without delay. He surprised Jacob dining in state, surrounded by his olive branches and the wife of his bosom.

Saturday was *fête* day in the Higgs' household. Sunday was much too busy; with service in the morning, funerals in the afternoon, and sermon in evening, very often there was not time even to go home. On this particular Saturday Jacob sat cutting thick slices from a leg of pork, the fragrance of which and the stuffing saluted Silas's nose long before he knocked at the door.

Mrs. Higgs came and curtsied. She was a thin, spare woman, with the stomach of an ostrich and appetite of a shark. Already three thick substantial slices, and stuffing to match, with potatoes baked beneath the delicacy *ad libitum*, had disappeared, and the still hungry expression of her face gave the idea that she could dispose of as much more with ease. Jacob had only been able to demolish two, and was already beginning to trifle with the crackling and such small bits; he was also beginning to be critical in the matter of potatoes.

"Can I see Mr. Higgs?" said Silas.

Jacob came forward to the open door. Three chubby children were eating as if indigestion was a mythical infliction only known to the dark ages.

"At dinner I see. Don't disturb yourself; I will wait for you in the churchyard."

"Very well, sir. I will be there in a minute."

Silas walked about a hundred and fifty yards and came to the churchyard gate, which being open, he entered the enclosure and found the usual quaint inscriptions on the tombstones. Going round he saw a most elaborate tomb. Curiosity induced him to read the inscription :—

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF
LIONEL M A U N D E R,
OF THE GRANGE,
Who died May 23, 18—
AGED 45.

ALSO TO
ELIZABETH,
WIFE OF THE ABOVE,
Who died, aged 47, June 22, 18—

A little to one side he saw a white carved slab of marble :—

Sacred to the Memory of
EUNICE MAUNDER,
WIFE OF JAMES MAUNDER, ESQ., OF THE GRANGE,
AGED 23,
Who died Jan. 15, 18—

In much plainer letters were cut beneath :—

ALSO OF
JAMES MAUNDER,
AGED 54,
ACCIDENTALLY DROWNED IN THE MILL-DAM,
June 15, 18—

“I wonder,” said Silas to himself, “if Lionel could return, what he would think of his descendants? I wish Higgs would come. How he will smell of onions, sage, and pork!” A smile crossed his face, which had hardly faded when Higgs appeared.

The face of the clerk was flushed, but not with wine. A pint of Littledale beer had hardly quieted the portion of the deceased pig, onions, and potatoes that Jacob had burdened his stomach with; his

flushed cheeks showed his stomach had hoisted the flag of rebellion.

"Would you see the church or the belfry first?"

"The church first, by all means."

They turned to the front of the edifice. The opened door admitted a rush of cold air that struck a chill to the heart of Jacob ; he sadly took out a tin snuff-box, but finding it empty, returned it to his pocket.

"Here," said Silas, "try some of mine, my friend."

Jacob's fishy eyes glistened; he partook, and then went round the church, describing its beauties and the principal tombstones, benefactions, etc. Thence he diverged to tell the grievance how he ought to have half of the rent of Lower Greenway for distributing the same, but the old vicar cut his pay down to forty pounds a year for it.

"What is the total rent ?" asked Pod.

"One hundred and eighty pounds a year."

"I do not see it in the list of benefactions."

Silas looked again, and found Dame Margery Greenacre had left a piece of land producing five pounds per annum, half to the clerk, and the rest to the poor for ever, called Greenway.

"But it was only five pounds a year then. How is that?"

"Well, you see, sir, it's been turned into water meadows now. It was only swamp when 'twas left to the poor."

"But you get forty pounds a year, don't you?"

"Yes; but it says half. The vicar told me if I was not contented he'd write to the Charitable Missioners, though I don't see what Missioners have got to do with us."

Silas laughed.

"You mean Charity Commissioners, my man."

"And you see, sir, them great safes; that's where the registers are kept. There ain't many churches got such a lot as we have."

"Who keeps the keys?"

"The vicar. I've got to go and ask for them when I want them. Them safes have been put ever since the registers was tried to be stolen years agone."

"Who tried?"

"No one knowed for certain, but there were people down from London about it, who made a great fuss; leastways, I heard so. One of the Mr.

St. Johns married a sister of one of the old barrownights."

"What baronet?"

"Sir Lawrence, to be sure. So there was a search made, and sure enough the marriage was found all right, so no one could make top or tail of it. 'Twas afore my time, ever so many years."

Silas then went up the tower, and saw nothing but cobwebs and dirt. When he returned, he found Higgs peacefully asleep on the grass; he had declined mounting the stairs, on Silas telling him it was no matter. On being awoke, his speech was more incoherent than ever; but he took his gratuity with unmeasured thanks, and contrived to steer himself home. Silas, when he got to the vicarage, said to Cyrus—

"How have you arranged for to-morrow?"

"Oh, Smithson preaches, as I arranged. The fee is an object to him."

Silas Pod went to bed early; the events of the day were over apparently, when a knock came at his door, and Cyrus demanded admittance. He was in a state of excitement.

"I wanted to tell you before you slept," he said.

“ What, that the room is haunted ? ”

“ No ; that Jane Bright, Matthew’s servant, found the back door open and marks of feet in the garden behind the house.”

“ That all ? ”

“ Yes ; but I thought you would like to know.”

“ I should like to go to sleep.”

Which happened to Silas very shortly, but not to Cyrus ; he lay tossing and turning in bed till the “ east was grey,” when he sunk into an uneasy slumber, full of distempered visions.





CHAPTER XV.

DOCTOR BLACK overtook the vicar as he was passing down the town early next morning to inquire for Matthew. In response to Cyrus's inquiries, he said—

“Matthew has had a very near squeak this time; he will hardly get over another. I don't think he will, and the worst of the case is, excitement of any sort may bring it on again.”

“Bring on what?” said Cyrus.

“Death. It is pronounced heart disease, which the excitement of yesterday has made chronic. It may and will return at intervals, but any sudden shock of joy or grief, even sudden immersion in cold water, would still his pulse for ever.”

“You are very open. I thank you.”

“You need not. I speak to you because I wish

you to admonish the young Maunders to be careful of Matthew's health ; they will attend to a clergyman more than a layman."

The doctor laughed and went in to visit another patient, and Cyrus continued his walk to Matthew's house.

He was admitted to the invalid, who was up and dressed. The parlour looked very neat and clean ; not a trace of yesterday's excitement was visible, except in a certain unhealthy paleness on Matthew's forehead. Cyrus shook him by the hand and said—

"I saw Doctor Black as I came down, and he is going to put you under my care. You are not to worry about anything whatever, or you will be ill again. James and Robert can attend to the business ; and if there is any extra capital wanted, I dare say they will find a friend to advance it."

Matthew looked up and smiling said, "I know who the friend will be."

Cyrus smiled in turn.

" You must not be surprised that I, as a clergyman, talk of secular matters on Sunday, but until the mind is easy about everyday affairs

we cannot turn our attention to things of higher importance."

Matthew nodded.

"If you feel quite at ease, I will go for to-day, as I promised to assist Mr. Smithson, if I could, in the services."

"I should wish to see you to-morrow, and the gentleman that befriended me. Could you take charge of what is his due for his services?"

"Nothing of the sort, Matthew. He would not hear of anything."

"Then you have been before me?"

"I have; I do not wish to deny it. But he is a rich man, without wife or children, and can afford to be liberal. I will bring him to-morrow, when you can thank him if you wish, but no money. If you don't promise that, I won't bring him."

"Very well, sir. I want him to do something else for me."

"I have no doubt he will, if possible. And now I must be off. Good day;" and Matthew was alone.

The brothers and sister had gone for a walk

before service, and the only one in the house with Matthew was Jane Bright, who now came in, made up the fire, administered a portion of medicine, and retired to the kitchen and her household duties. Jane's raiment had undergone a great change for the better since she lived with Matthew. A clean print dress, all one pattern this time, fitted a trim figure; the eyes beamed with intelligence and, when they rested on Matthew, with affectionate devotion. He had rescued her from a poverty-stricken home, where she had been anything but happy, and her joyous nature expanded in the sunshine. Her sterling heart was not loosened in its fibres by prosperity, but rather the sun of prosperity expanded it in almost rapturous devotion and pleasure that she, the little-esteemed drudge, could be of use to her benefactor.

The church bell began to toll its solemn invitation to all that heard it. Scarcely had it done so for more than two or three minutes, when Cyrus entered the vestry. The Rev. John Smithson was just putting on his surplice when Cyrus entered; Higgs was in attendance as master of the robes. The Rev. John dismissed him rather quickly, and then said—

“ I got a note this morning.”

“ Did you, indeed? What was it about?”

“ Mrs. Smithson was not so well. I expect an addition to my olive branches;” and he sighed. Money was scarce with him, and the cares of a large family sat heavily on him.

“ Very well, then; you read the prayers and I will preach.”

“ That is indeed kind, and then I can go home nearly at once. I will be sure and be in time for the evening service.”

The church filled rapidly; pew after pew received its quota of worshippers. There was more than the usual quantity of conversation over the backs and sides of the pews. A great deal had happened since last Sunday, and Littledale deemed the subjects as yet not sufficiently ventilated. The organ began to play, the occupants of the pews settled down in their places, and the prayers began. The second hymn was finished, and the Rev. Mr. Smithson descended from the reading-desk and went into the vestry, followed by the vicar. A great many looks were exchanged when Cyrus ascended the pulpit and his supply did not

reappear. Looking over the congregation, he opened his Bible, the hymn ceased, and he began his discourse—“‘For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.’

“The word love is associated in the minds of most with only a very small portion of life; whereas, far from it, it is carried everywhere. He who does not love all men injures himself; he cuts himself off from all the best and noblest associations of life—like the prickly cactus that grows alone in the desert, injuring all that approach with its prickles; it dies alone and unpitied: his place knows him no more. A trader, overreaching in his bargains, injures himself; a hard dry germ of selfishness is planted in his heart that, like the dry rot, will eat away its best and truest emotions. The nations that have gone before on the earth, how did they fall but by ignoring the law of love? When the Roman emperors and people gave the early Christians to the beasts, and the savage denizens of the forests fought over the fragments, did the new faith die? Far from it; it flourished, and the blossoms of faith and love it bore were as

'a sweet savour.' The oppressed few that helped one another through dark and terrible days conquered by the divine power of love. It is the old story : 'The meek shall inherit the earth.'

"Where is now the Roman who brought all nations under his yoke ? Gone for ever, and only a few stones and ruins remain to attest his sometime greatness and power. It is gone—the power of the nation that ruled by conquest. Where are the Phœnicians who, with an enterprise and courage heroic of its kind, urged their swift galleys through distant seas, far beyond even the imagination of the age they lived in ? Many have thought the ruined temples of Mexico were their handiwork, but the rowers who sat on the benches were chained to the oars ; they were slaves. Tyre ruled by the lash and the power of abject fear. Where is now the proud Mistress of the Seas ? On her site the fisher spreads his net to dry, where once the merchants of the earth trafficked their various commodities from the ends thereof.

"But I wish more particularly to deal with the loss to those who do not feel love to their neighbours. It does not consist only of giving, although

the love that does not give is at best a very languid thing. We cannot all give money or money's worth, but we can give what no money can buy. Benjamin West, the great painter, when he made a sketch of his baby sister and showed it to his mother—she did not give him a slice of cake, or money; she gave him a kiss. ‘That kiss,’ said he, ‘made me a painter.’ The law of universal love will keep a man, woman, or child from repeating anything to the injury of others. ‘Charity (or love) hopeth all things.’ The almost superhuman genius that sat on the throne of a neighbouring country, what use did he make of his great power? He oppressed the nations, and died a prisoner in a foreign land. The lonely willow that stood above the grave of Napoleon has a teaching that speaks for ever. The Apostle John lived a very noble life; he ended his days in exile. His writings, which furnish the text to-day, were little thought of at the time they were written. But which shines higher in the history of the world? How many people now read the life of the conqueror, except with a certain interest, as part of the story of our race? But the words of John shine brighter

and brighter ; they appeal to all nations, kindreds, and tongues to the end of time. Look, again, at the everyday life of each one that breathes and moves. Do they possess the love of their fellow-men ? If they do, you will find they love their neighbours. He who does not love his neighbour, how can he expect to rise to a glad and happy eternity ? It could not be that tale-bearing and scandal shall enter heaven. Here we have only a few gates—the eye, the ear, the nose, the mouth, and the mind—to catch a glimpse of the ineffable glory of God, who teaches us, in the orbs that stud the sky, one great lesson of love to all. Each brilliant orb that rides in beauty and majesty the measureless ether, all with a beneficial power of love keep each other in their place. Were the great law of attraction abrogated for a single hour, each planet or sun would fall from his place and universal chaos ensue.

“ Here, as I before remarked, we have only five gates ; we may in a future state have fifty or five hundred, and only those who rightly use the talents entrusted to them can hope to be entrusted with more. The servant who hid his talent, who was

selfish, was cast into outer darkness ; and when we look at the great tragedy of the race of a Nazarene peasant nailed to a cross, the most vile of punishments in the eyes of Jew or Roman, we see the great truth again of love to our fellows. Our Master was despised and betrayed, and yet His mighty love has subdued the best and purest kingdoms of the earth for ever. Solomon saw it afar off : ‘His banner over me was love.’ Let us all humbly, not with arrogance and self-esteem, but ‘by love serving one another,’ keep as far as in us lies a pure and just heart, and we shall find, as we love our fellows and speak of them gently, kindly, and truly, it will be returned into our own bosoms. ‘Whoso giveth a cup of cold water shall in no wise lose his reward.’ When we think of that great city where the tree of life for ever grows, do we try to fit ourselves for that great and blessed place ? do we remember that ‘naught that defileth shall ever enter in’ ? A very worldly man was once elected director of the gaieties of a fashionable town ; his reign was long and prosperous. He chose for the centre law of his little kingdom, ‘Those who repeat evil shall be taken for the

authors.' So you see that the most worldly and frivolous cannot abrogate, even among themselves, the law of love.

"Time fails me. I could enlarge on the theme, but rather let me beseech each one of you to follow in his own heart the few suggestions that I have laid before you. They are profitable for the life that now is, as well as that which is to come. The soul and not the body is the source of all true pleasure. We are soon fatigued, soon satiated, and soon descend to the narrow tomb. The body can endure but little of the most refined torture ; insensibility steps in, and we can feel no more. The nerves are all on the surface, and they being cut through, the surgeon, when amputating, can hack at the flesh as if it had no feeling. The sting of poverty may be sharp, I do not wish to deny ; the pleasure of the possession of riches may satisfy for a very short time ; but the remembrance of a good or bad action will last us through life with a depth and intensity we are always forgetting, and to recollections of this sort poverty and riches are alike : they will fall off with the body, but our good or bad actions will follow us through eternity."

Cyrus concluded with the Benediction, and the congregation dispersed. Those who had been most forward to say, confidentially, that Matthew had slipped through the fingers of justice were very silent on the subject; they thought uneasily of his unobtrusive goodness to one and all in time of doubt, care, and trouble.

The vicar took off the black silk gown he always preached in, and slowly walked to the vicarage, where he found a cold luncheon awaiting him. Silas Pod had gone out, and was nowhere to be seen; a man had called on him, and they went out together.

Jacob Higgs went home feeling very uncomfortable, so he cut a good piece off the cold leg of pork, and sent it to a poor widow who lived near. There was, it happened, no funeral that afternoon, so he took his three children for a walk, and was surprised to find the country lanes were more worth looking at than he had thought possible.

Maurice Jones also went for a walk, and picked up an amusing companion, whose conversation he found very interesting.

Matthew sat at home quietly all the morning,

and in the afternoon softly fell asleep. The house was empty; the clock ticked, and that was all that could be heard, except a mouse that crept in and out of a hole under the skirting-board, and was looking for its dinner.

Matthew slept on. The events of the last few days mingled with the past and future in fantastic visions. He was young again. He saw Eunice in youth and beauty; she smiled on him, and beckoned to another to join them. He looked round and saw the vicar come as invited, but alone. She looked unhappy, and was about to ask further, when Cyrus pointed at Matthew. Again the scene changed. He saw the court of the day before with dreadful clearness. All the people gibed and pointed at him. Again the scene changed, and he saw James and Robert alone; and then a third figure was with them, but he could not see who, and Robert and James floated round. They passed by him, but spoke not. He tried to speak but could not, and the idea came over him that he was invisible to them. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth in agony; and with that he awoke, and found Jane just bringing in the tea tray.



CHAPTER XVI.

JOSHUA SMITH sat in his office on Monday morning. He had had time to think the matter out, and he came to the conclusion that Matthew had burnt the papers, fearing detection for “unlawful possession;” so, in order to make his mind quite clear on the subject, he rang the office bell, and Maurice appeared.

“Did you ring, sir?”

“Yes. Sit down. I want to get at the bottom of the facts of the trial at the Town Hall on Saturday. What do you know or think?”

Maurice coloured, and was uneasy at the thought that he was going to be entrapped; but his accustomed resolute course of action cleared him completely. He promptly stuck a fly on the

object glass of his master's mental telescope; and it forthwith looked an elephant; the fly of fiction looked the elephant of truth.

"Sir, I think I can tell you what is become of them."

"Do, then, at once."

"Jane, Matthew Elgood's servant, so I heard this morning, has found marks in the garden at the back of the house. Now, if you recollect, sir, Saturday is the day the men call for any rubbish or rags to exchange for plates and dishes. They called in the morning; Jane went to the back door: they hardly ever call at the front of any house. I should think that she left the door unbolted in a moment of forgetfulness, and they returned, having observed the women folk leave the house and recollected the men were in the shop. Perhaps they overheard something, and, whether they did or not, may have snatched the documents up and hid them under the rags of their cart, and are waiting to claim a reward if it is offered."

Joshua looked thoughtfully at his clerk. He weighed the pros and cons, and decided it was correct; but it would not do to acknowledge his

clerk had thought of what he had not, so he said—

“ I certainly think that my idea is correct : that the *chiffonniers*, having obtained entrance in the morning, returned and made off with the papers. I should not mind giving twenty pounds for them, if you could get any one to see them. Perhaps five bright sovereigns might satisfy them, as they are ignorant men and can scarcely read.”

“ Excuse me, sir, but I would rather not try. My name has been brought forward too much to be pleasant already.”

“ Whom do you propose, then ? You have, I have no doubt, some one in your eye.”

“ I should propose Pomeroy.”

“ We hold the lease of his house as security for a small sum of money he borrowed ; he would not dare to play false.”

“ Shall I send for him, sir ? ”

John Pomeroy, p.c., was sent for and instructed. Five shillings smoothed the way. With a promise of secrecy on Joshua’s part, he departed with the assurance he would give early attention to the case.

A jolly looking man was walking down the street. A resplendent tie was round his throat; a pair of worn dog-skin gloves, a coat and waist-coat of navy blue, check trowsers, and a pair of laced boots, completed his attire. Jonathan Harker had been engaged in many delicate cases, but here he was puzzled. Pod had told him his suspicions, in which he hardly agreed with his employer; "for," he reasoned, "if Edward St. John had the papers, they would hardly have given Matthew in charge, and been so disconcerted when the case broke down." So, having a little time, he went to Matthew's shop. He found James and Robert busy but taciturn. He looked at some boots and turned the conversation in the direction of the late events. He put no searching questions; he went to "break ground" only to-day.

He then went to Joshua's office and found Maurice on guard; his employer and son were absent on business or pleasure. Putting on an air of great disappointment at Joshua's absence, he said, if allowed, he would wait his return. At length he said to Maurice Jones—

"You look pretty deep; do you know if the

governor has any small property to sell? I want a little house to buy or rent, as may suit me, but it must be a long lease."

"Yes," said Maurice, "there are several, but they are let for the present. In a month or so you could have one or two."

"Well, you seem a good-natured chap; can I get lodgings anywhere? I ain't so comfortable as I could wish at the Feathers. I like company of an evening, but all day is too much."

"There are several people, if you could give a reference, would make room; but, as a rule, there are not many let regularly."

"What time do you leave at night? Perhaps you could go round with me, and we could go back to the Feathers to supper."

"At five o'clock, if it will suit you, and tomorrow we could give you a list of cottages and houses. What's your price?"

"Oh, I am not particular up to ten or twelve pounds a year."

One o'clock struck. Maurice got down his other coat and prepared to depart for dinner. Mr. Harker looked inquiringly.

"I am going to dinner. Good day for the present."

"Come and have a glass."

"Not now, thank you."

"Where is the vicarage?"

"About two hundred yards off; the top of the town; green gate and brick pillars, privet hedge," and they separated.

Jonathan Harker went back to see Pod and report progress.

"I've come back, sir."

"Well, found anything yet?" said Pod.

"No; but I expect to shortly. No one saw the young un speak to his father, but that ain't much. If they got the papers, they are fools to go so far as they did; but if they haven't, they'll set some one to work. You always trusted me before, so if you'll tell me all now I can commence work. You haven't yet."

"Go to the Feathers and dine. You can come back for a written testimonial the vicar promised you, and I will in the mean time put it all down on paper for your guidance. After that you must not come again too soon. These little places breed gossip like meat does maggots."

Harker grinned acquiescence and departed. When he returned, about three o'clock, Pod had all the particulars written out for Harker's guidance, who, after carefully looking it over, said—

"I find there were five people might have them —Matthew Elgood, James Maunder, Gabriel St. John, Edward St. John, and Maurice Jones. Now, Gabriel didn't have them for certain, which reduces it to four. James did not, because he had not got the chance, which again reduces it to three. Now, the worst thing for us would be that Edward St. John had them, 'cause he can't be paid or persuaded unless he has debts. If he has, he is the man ; if he has not, I don't think he is. You will receive reports from your office, when necessary, how business is going on, in envelopes directed in your own hand; so just do me half a dozen now, please, sir."

Silas did as he was requested.

"All right. You will receive the first report on Wednesday morning; if anything of importance turns up I shall call."

Harker went back to the Feathers and made arrangements for supper, and again strolled out

till five o'clock. When Maurice came out he found him waiting in the street outside. After looking at several, two rooms were fixed on at Jacob Higgs's. In answer to the demand for references, Jonathan paid a sovereign down in advance. They then adjourned to the Feathers, where a private room and a tripe supper awaited them. Their hunger being appeased, Jonathan ordered a bottle of brandy and hot water. He poured the brandy into another bottle, which he always carried. It was of peculiar construction. It had a division down the centre; in the one side he poured three parts of the brandy, and one quarter into the other. The side he intended for his own consumption had a little toast and water in it already. The bottle was not a very clear one, so that he could manipulate the glasses of spirits of various strengths for himself and guest.

"I say, Jones, could you put me up to a job—I dare say you could—about these lost papers I heard the landlord talking about? I have nothing to do, and have often thought I should make a very good detective."

Maurice had nearly got through his first glass.

The suggestion was just what he wanted to make, but he had been afraid of showing his hand.

"The governor would insist on a testimonial of character, I expect, if you was put on the job."

"All right, I've got one. Here it is."

It was a paper very dirty and worn from being carried in the pocket, and stated the bearer was a careful, prudent man, and had collected the rents of William Opie, of Tottenham Court Road, for four years, and was discharged in consequence of the sale of the property.

"That will do. It's all right if Mr. Smith writes to William Opie, I suppose?"

"Right as a trivet. How much do you think I should get a week?"

"Nothing. You will have to go on the bargain 'No cure, no pay.'"

"But can your governor prove his right to them?"

"I suppose so," and Maurice winked. "He would prefer getting them on the quiet; he would get better paid, and you too."

Jonathan winked in return.

"Now to business. Can you put me up to anything in the matter? Take another glass."

This glass was stronger considerably than the last, and unlocked the tongue of Maurice.

"Yes. He thinks that those fellows who go round with rags and bones got them, but if anybody had them as knew their value, they are worth a lot of money."

"Why?" asked Jonathan, apparently looking with great deference at the other.

"'Cause they can tell who is and who is not the heir to the Chiveydale property, to be sure."

Jonathan knocked over his glass in his excitement; the last speech of Jones's had been a slip of the tongue. Jonathan refilled *both* glasses and proceeded.

"If I am not paid by the week, them as paid most should have them, and I would give anybody a share as helped me."

Maurice now looked at his watch; he said it was late. He was quite or nearly sober, and was filled with disgust at himself that he had been such a fool as to let out so much. Jonathan pressed him to stay. He looked half dazed for a minute;

suddenly his face assumed a look of great delight, which puzzled Jonathan very much indeed. He stayed and drank, but nothing else could Jonathan get out. As the clock was on the stroke of twelve, he departed in high glee, and promised to see Jonathan to-morrow.

When Maurice woke next morning, he took the opportunity to write a letter to a friend of his in London :—

“ Littledale.

“ DEAR WILL,

“ You always said you were willing to do a thing or two for me ; I want you to do it now. Get at once, and send to the post-office here to be called for, a bundle of old paper, plain but dirty ; also three or four pieces of parchment that have been used before, but cleaned with acid ; also enclose a small piece of liquorice and cochineal. Get the paper with *no date* in the water-mark, if you can ; if you can’t, send half sheets. I enclose stamps to the amount of ten shillings. Send by return, as it is *important*.

“ All the people down here much as usual. Sally B—— has not yet got a place, and lives with

her aunt, who is reconciled to her; but Sall is not to your departure, so you had better not show here at present.

“Yours very truly,

“MAURICE JONES.

“Mr. William Green.”

Harker was waiting for Maurice next day, to improve his acquaintance; but Maurice said he must go to the post-office for stamps, and left Jonathan rather abruptly.

Jonathan followed as Maurice left the post. He wanted seven ninepenny stamps; the post-mistress went to another room to get them. Half a sheet of penny stamps was on the counter, also some loose ones. Quick as thought, Jonathan leaned over into the window where the letter-box was, and turned over the last letter. It was directed in a legal hand, so he knew he was right:

“*Mr. William Green,*

Care Messrs. Doem & Co.,

Chancery Lane,

London.”

“What time does the London post go?”

“Four o’clock,” said the post-mistress.

“Do you sell many stamps?”

“No, I don’t; I wish I did. Lawyer Smith is my best customer; he had a sheet yesterday, and Mr. Jones bought half another sheet to-day. They must have a lot of letters.”

“I should think so;” and Jonathan departed.

Jonathan went into his room at the Feathers, and also wrote a note to a friend of his near Chancery Lane:—

“Only for one day

William Green,

Doem & Co.,

Chancery Lane,

London,

till post time. Write during day anything of importance. Take a cab to Central P. O., and get posted letter. Direct—

Mr. J. Harker,

The Feathers,

Littledale.”

Jonathan, feeling satisfied with his progress, walked down to Matthew’s shop. He again

spoke about the boots, and bought a pair. James was in the shop alone. He then said to James, having given a good look at his face—

“ Can you keep a secret ? ”

“ Rather,” said James.

“ All your people out ? ”

“ No. Governor’s upstairs ; all the rest are, except the servant.”

“ Send her out for something, and let me look at your back garden, and I’ll give you a sovereign.”

James hesitated not a minute. The love of gold had risen higher and higher in his soul ; with the difficulty of acquisition the love had increased. Jane was despatched for a piece of cheese. Jonathan was trying all sorts of games with the curtain in the shop, but it could not be made to do anyhow. He looked puzzled. James returned and held out his hand, in which Jonathan placed a sovereign. The garden was searched over with no result.

“ I thought your girl said she saw marks ? ”

“ Yes ; but they were not footmarks. There was a mark nearly round, and a little one another shape, but smaller, and then a little one at the side ; they were not very plain.”

They returned to the shop.

“ Does your curtain always stand where it does now ? ”

“ Certainly not. It is on an iron rod that fixes to sockets. It was the other side on Saturday. We change it every week.”

“ Good day ; ” and Jonathan walked to the door.

But he looked so long and earnestly that James was half afraid he wanted to come back and rob the shop. At length he went, but not far, for he walked round to the back and looked at the back door. It was in an ill-kept lane, but on a stone he found the mark of a man’s heel well defined.

“ I’ve got it,” he said, “ and the only question is how much to offer.”

He was so elated that he did not look at the passers-by. Consequently he knocked against the next one, who said—

“ Now, then, how much more ? ”

“ I beg—— ” But Jonathan stopped and looked with amusement at the stranger. “ Why, Jack Harrison, how come you here ? Glad to see you.”

The two men shook hands and adjourned to the Feathers.

"What are you after, Jack?"

"Cutting corns, to be sure. I am travelling in the line."

"It won't do, Jack."

"Well, perhaps you'll tell me what I am come for."

"Yes, I will. You are after some papers which you have left behind at the Manor."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, of course, old Mr. St. John made a fool of you to send you hunting for what he's got. Bless you, they are safe in the strong box at Stratton."

"How did they get there?"

"Why, Mr. Edward St. John gave them to the coachman, to be sure. A man of your talent can soon see that."

"What are you after, then?" said Jack Harrison, rather sulkily.

"Same lay, dear boy. So much a week and all expenses, so I am going to stay as long as I can doing nothing. It's a change after London. Do you like fishing? I am going this afternoon," continued Jonathan, with imperturbable good humour.

Jack very sulkily said he was going somewhere else. Harker continued to press and Jack Harrison to refuse, until Harker said—

“Very well ; I’ll go by myself.”

Maurice Jones had, what was very rare with him, an afternoon walk. He had to go and get some tithes from a village three miles off ; so he set off in high feather, walking along the road, and as he walked his thoughts ran very agreeably to himself.

“I shall get—at least, I hope to—a hat full of money for the papers from each party. I will make copies and then mix up originals and copies so that Old Nick couldn’t tell this from that. I’ll cut old Joshua. I’ll stick up to Clara. She is a very nice girl ; I could not do better, and would look well. The only thing is that cursed parson is sniffing after her. But I don’t suppose he has spoke yet ; if he has, I’ll try and best him. That toad James thinks I had the papers. P’raps I had. What’s that to him, beastly sneak ? And young St. John was sweet as well, only Matthew put a stopper on it. I dare say something will turn up ; if it don’t, I’ll make it. As for that prying fellow

Harker, I'll give him a dose he won't like. Clara don't like me yet, but she will if I play my cards right. She's only a girl, and all girls can be frightened or persuaded ; besides, she don't get on well with James and Robert. I'm sure I could get on in London with a lump of cash in hand. I can be a gentleman. I've got brains ; why shouldn't I ? Others have. Dash my wig ! I'll begin to-night. Every one tries to cheat me if they can, and why can't I get what I can ? So I will ; " and he stepped out, transacted his business, and returned.

He found on his return that Gabriel had been to the office. "Good !" he soliloquized, as he returned a short way up one of the lanes and picked a small bunch of dog-roses. "Yes," he said, looking at the bunch ; "they are more pretty than I am, but I have more brains, so now for the opening of the ball. I've looked out quite a good quotation to use. The parson hasn't showed up since he came back. That's one to me. 'Fortune favours the bold.' "

He went to his lodgings, made a fresh arrangement of his nosegay, smartened his dress, and

called at Matthew Elgood's shop. Robert was in attendance; the others were having tea. He was sitting sadly on a chair.

"I came for my boots," said Maurice.

"Here they are," said Robert sadly. He shared the suspicions of James about Maurice.

"James in and disengaged? I wanted to see you two."

James came out, and the accomplished schemer began to lay his toils. In an absent manner, he handed Robert rather too much money. He thus appealed to that which was the master of the two, and inclined them, against their better judgment, to look on him more favourably.





CHAPTER XVII.

JAMES and Robert waited for Maurice to begin.

“ I lodged, as you know, with Matthew for some time, and it was then I became acquainted with his good heart; and now I cannot see Matthew and those I wish to serve in danger of losing their own because of family misfortunes. But if you mistrust me say so at once, and I will go. I risk a great deal by saying so much.”

Both hearers could only assent. Apparently, he had nothing to gain and everything to lose.

Maurice continued : “ I was sent out of the way to-day when Mr. Gabriel St. John called, but returned sooner than the governor thought. The door was ajar, and I heard Mr. Gabriel and him talking. Mr. Gabriel said——”

"What?" said the brothers together.

"I can only tell it in the presence of Matthew."

The brothers both went inside, bundled out Jane into the other regions, and persuaded Clara to go upstairs. Matthew was apprised of the facts as far as they had gone. At the first glance he mistrusted Maurice; but the recollection that he had always paid his rent regularly, and the suggestions of the two brothers that he had nothing to gain by coming to them, nearly extinguished the doubt in his mind. Maurice was invited in and asked to take a seat. James sat at the parlour door, so as to command a view of the shop; Robert sat by Matthew, who was sitting by the fireplace; Maurice sat at the other side of the table, with his back to the door leading into the passage.

Maurice began afresh better than ever, but first he took out two or three bits of paper from his pocket, which were mixed with one or two trifles, and put them down by the nosegay.

"You see, Mr. Elgood, ever since I lodged with you I have never been so comfortable, and the consequence is I have really often stayed at the office instead of going home; and when I was copying

drafts and things, instead of only copying, I tried to understand them. I found that the title of all property was very complicated, but that some near here was very defective indeed ; that property was often sold, and deeds omitted that settled it otherwise. Now, James and Robert's grandfather was a very careful man ; but all mention of him is omitted in the sale of pieces of the Grange estate, and I have often thought it was done with a purpose. Now, James Maunder, your father, sold the estate to Mr. Smith, my governor, in a very hurried way, and had no lawyer on his side to stand out for price ; but, on the other hand, Mr. Joshua would never have given so small a price if he thought the title so very clear, and the papers now lost—who can tell where they are ?—may have contained (I think they did) something relating to the Grange estates.”

“But why, in that case, did Mr. Gabriel want them ? ” said Matthew.

“They may have been papers of the Stratton estates as well. Mr. Lionel Maunder was a very rich man ; he may have lent money on mortgage on the Stratton estates, which deeds once burnt

leave no trace ; but deeds of settlement would be necessarily kept as proof of title."

"What do you propose to do ?" said Robert, who had with difficulty followed the line of argument.

"To search further ; but unless you give me your friendship I shall not proceed. I make no stipulation for myself, only if you get back all that is your own, perhaps you would not mind letting me collect the smaller rents. You might give me, say, one hundred pounds a year, which is plenty to live on. I do not look for myself entirely."

"But how can you proceed ? You are not a lawyer yet," said Matthew.

"No, Mr. Elgood ; but I have saved money, and with such a hope before me of doing good, I should go to London and qualify myself."

Matthew felt a glow at the fancied discovery of a kindred spirit, and said at once—

"You must come to supper here to-night."

Maurice had fished for this invitation, but, with his usual talent, half declined.

"No, sir, I should fancy I was being bought ;

but I will look in in the evening, later, say at eight o'clock." Saying which, he rose to depart.

All three attended their newly found friend into the shop. The door immediately opened on the passage, and Clara came in. The schemer, who was last, saw his opportunity was come. She had taken up the wild roses. He came back, and, feigning confusion, made a snatch at the papers, but left the roses and speedily went into the shop. Clara went back a step, again advanced, and took up the flowers. There was a piece of paper tied round the stems, not very carefully. Matthew, James, and Robert lingered a moment looking out into the street. The future was assuming a bright hue that only hope can lend. When we see a something glittering far off in the path of life, we image it to be the diamond of truth that will cut our way to fortune or adorn its possession, whereas it is most commonly a piece of broken glass, that cuts the fingers grasping it, or injures the feet of the traveller as he walks over it.

Clara took up the wild roses. A thorn pricked her finger, so, putting the wounded finger in her mouth, she went into the kitchen as the others

returned to the parlour. A small vase was soon filled with water as she said, half to herself—

“I will give these back to Mr. Jones when he comes again.”

She was about to throw away the paper that wrapped the stems, when she saw some writing on it. As she had never read “Moore’s Irish Melodies,” it struck her as being very good for original composition :—

“Remember thee! yes, while there’s life in this heart,
It shall never forget thee, all lorn as thou art;
More dear in thy sorrow, thy gloom, and thy showers,
Than the rest of the world in their sunniest hours.

“Wert thou all that I wish thee—great, glorious, and free,
First flower of the earth and first gem of the sea—
I might hail thee with prouder, with happier brow,
But oh! could I love thee more deeply than now?”

She was sorry that Maurice was throwing his heart away. “But such things will be,” she thought, and took the roses up to her bedroom. When there, she took out the paper and read it again, this time with even greater attention. She had never received anything of the sort before. Cyrus was too bashful, and Edward too cautious. She took them out a third time, and turned the

paper over. It was folded in the centre. On the inner side was more writing ; it was fragmentary, but to the point :—

“ Can I tell—no, I cannot, except by the request of the person injured and deceived—what I have discovered ? I am, the most wretched of men. She ! left with uncongenial companions that understand not greatness of soul, above the love of gold ! When I wander in the lane at the back of her house between half-past ten and eleven every night, I feel I could summon courage in the dusk to reveal the tale, but in the daylight never.”

Here it broke off, and Clara was filled with burning curiosity, but determined she would not go. The note was not signed ; it might be a hoax or accidental scrap of writing. Then she thought it would be the best plan to see if there was anything in it. She could easily go for a minute ; she need not speak. As she looked at the writing a deeper blush came on her cheek. She had never had a tender epistle before, and it moved her. Why had not Cyrus written, if he had not called ? Here was a man who risked all for her sake. She

could never betray him ; but, then, it was such a bold thing. So she thought, " No, I won't." Then the artful suggestion of being deceived, and " uncongenial companions," and the remembrance of the disagreement about the parlour ornaments settled the question. Ever since that miserable day she had felt her affection for her brothers less ; they had seemed to move in different orbits.

Jane called her, so, putting the paper in her pocket, she came downstairs. Matthew was sitting in the parlour with James and Robert. As she came in, he addressed her—

" My dear Clara, we have talked the matter over and come to the conclusion that we unjustly suspected Mr. Jones of taking the papers. You must be very careful not to repeat anything I now tell you ; he has proved himself a true friend, risking for you and your brothers loss of daily bread. He is coming to-night at eight o'clock to tell us further particulars. I thought it best you should be present, as women are proverbially sharp-sighted in such matters. Your brothers thought differently, but are now of my way of thinking. Jane Bright had better be sent out.

She can go to-night and visit her cousins at the farm; they will see her home, so we shall be entirely alone."

Clara had blushed vividly; Matthew put it down to surprise and joy. He had made one of those unfortunate mistakes that the best of men make unknowingly. The admission that her brothers wished her absent from the conference gave the words of the note, "uncongenial companions," "confirmation strong as Holy Writ."

"Very well, Matthew. I will tell Jane to get the supper ready, and then she can go."

Maurice arrived punctually; he had considered his ground and laid his plans. When he entered, Clara coloured, but no one but himself observed it. "It works," he thought.

Matthew said kindly, "First, we will have our bread and cheese."

Maurice said nothing, but sat down. Their ordinary supper was supplemented with cold meat and salad, to which all did justice. The jug of ale was at last exhausted and the table cleared by the exertions of all except Matthew, who sat still thinking. Maurice made himself quite at home

in an unobtrusive manner that was apparently the reverse of encroaching. The table cleared, Matthew filled his pipe and smoked in a thoughtful manner.

" You see," began Maurice, " I can only on this occasion give you an idea of what I am going to do, not what I have done, although I have done something now. Mr. Gabriel St. John called at the office while I was out to-day, and I returned while he was there. They got out a lot of the Stratton and Grange deeds; they had the boxes down, because I was called to put them up again. Besides, other people are interested in the matter of the lost papers."

" Who ? " said Robert.

" Why, the vicar ; he and his friend thought such a lot of them, they have employed a detective to hunt them up."

All four auditors made a movement of surprise.

" Yes, it is so, I know for certain. Now, has any one ever asked you, James, Robert, or Miss Clara, about the family history?"

James and Robert both said " No," when to their great surprise, Clara said—

"I have been asked a great deal. When I was at Stratton Manor, Mr. Edward was always asking me questions I thought very strange about father and grandfather, and whether I knew who they married; and he often asked if Mr. Smith bought all the estates, and if I could tell what he gave for them; and, what was most odd, he was most curious about my mother, and if she brought any property, and if no property, any deeds or papers."

"You remember what I thought of a possible mortgage," said Maurice, solemnly, who saw a golden opportunity to clear his doubts in another direction of a possible suitor of Clara's. "Did he ever ask or talk of other matters, Clara?"

"No. What should he have to talk about else?" said she, with the slightest suspicion of extra colour.

"I think that Maurice is quite correct in his ideas, and that we can do nothing at present except watch. Something may turn up of importance, if we all keep a look-out. Few things can happen in Littledale and we not hear of it—that is, one or other of us," said James, who had

been silent, and taken no part in the conversation till now.

"I've got it. When your poor father was drowned, all his pockets were searched. The papers and a few things were of no use, and were given to me on your behalf. I also had his clothes, but have never looked at them; they brought no very pleasant ideas," said Matthew, in an excited manner. "You, James, as the eldest, and Maurice, go to the closet at the back of the drawers in my room, and see if anything was left in the coat, and bring down any papers."

They departed, and were gone half an hour or so. They returned with sundry scraps of papers, and the intelligence that the breast-pocket had a hole in the bottom, through which a paper had worked its way down to the bottom. It was produced, and was much decayed and frayed; but a part was decipherable by Maurice's help:—

"*S copy o*
l t a ed from
J. th for l ses
£7 13s., and whic
wa half the same."

Maurice looked at it long and carefully. He then made out the missing parts, which were blotted and decayed by the action of the water :—

“ Short copy of my property. List of amounts received from J. Smith for land and houses, £7000 13s., and the which was not half the fair value of the same.”

“ You see the rest has been torn off and lost. I will take a copy, and wish you good night,” said Maurice.

“ Why go yet ? ” said James.

Maurice looked at Clara, who turned away and said, “ I really must say good night.”

The four men all shook hands and separated. Clara had gone into the kitchen. Maurice did not seem to observe her absence and departed. Matthew went to bed and soon fell asleep. He felt fatigued ; since his attack he was not so strong as he had been. James, Robert, and Clara said they would sit up for Jane, who would soon be there. Ten o’clock struck and she arrived. All then separated for the night.

“ I will see to the bolts, Jane. You are tired,” said Clara.

She went to the back door and undid it, then walked across the garden and unfastened the door. She came in looking hot and guilty, although no one was downstairs. She heard James and Robert talking in low, earnest tones, but their room looked out at the front. The stars shone brightly overhead, but there was no moon. She could hear the palpitating of her heart. She thought she would not go. Then her curiosity was again aroused, and she went softly down the garden. "There was no harm," she argued, "in looking out at the lane in the back." As she did so, a form came from the dark shadow of the wall, and stood in the starlight. It was Maurice Jones. She wished she had not come, but it was too late.

"You have been true and brave," said he. He always complimented people on what he imagined they did not possess, which many people in a far higher station and larger arenas of action have found efficacious in other places.

"What have you got to say? I thought I heard a noise, and came out to see, not expecting to speak to any one."

"I cannot resist telling you, as you ask me, why I wished to see you. Clara, you are the star of my hopes and the anchor of my soul!"

"Well, what?"

"Have you seen Mr. Clark since his return? No, you have not; and why? Because he is base and wicked, only thinking of money."

"How do you know?"

"Very well. By the advice of his fine friend he has kept off."

"Well, if he has, what was I to him or to you?"

"You were a good deal to him once, because the papers lost would have brought him wealth and power."

"And my brothers too."

"He would have made a bargain for himself."

"Why?"

"Because he has not since their loss been near you. He came with a lawyer to try and get them, and found them gone. Mrs. Parkhouse told him the story, and he saw a great deal to be made of them."

"I cannot tell if I ought to believe you."

“I can. He is waiting to see if they are got back. If they are, he will come back and be received. He is a great man, and rich already, while I am poor at present, as all think. But I shall not be so long. Things have happened; I shall get wealth and power. I may go to London, but not alone. But if you can be happy, I am content, and will bring my wealth to your feet, though life in a little country town is dull to clever people. In a great city are pleasures we know nothing of here.”

“I am content.”

But it had a very discontented tone. He saw his advantage and resumed—

“You, my Clara, are beautiful and fitted to shine in those great assemblies of wit and wealth. What is there to amuse in a country vicarage? Oh, Clara, glance at me once with compassion and I shall be content. Your presence is enough for me.”

Clara was getting excited. She hardly knew where she was; her legs trembled, and she waxed faint. Maurice, quick as thought, produced a flask from his pocket.

"Wet your lips, or you will faint and be discovered. Quick, my love!"

She put it to her lips; it was mellow but strong spirits and water. As a small portion went down her throat, she felt it burn like fire; but when fairly down, a fire seemed to run through her veins, her heart beat wildly.

"I must go," she said. "I shall be missed and ruined."

"Yes. I only think for you, who might be the queen of society! I will go at once."

And he did, but first slipped a ring on her finger. She tottered back to the door, bolted it with frenzied haste, fastened the back door more cautiously, and went to bed—but not to sleep. The first bite of forbidden fruit was pleasant to the taste; the suggestions of pleasure filled her mind with a thrill of delight.

Maurice went home. He too went to bed, but tossed on his couch.

"I will gain her or perish in the attempt," he said.

It was long before sleep sealed his eyelids, and when it did the visions of the night chased one

another with feverish rapidity. He arose the next morning only half refreshed, but, as he thought of the work of the day, became calmer and murmured, half aloud—

“ My foot is only on the first round of the ladder. Patience ; I must not turn giddy yet.”

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